



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

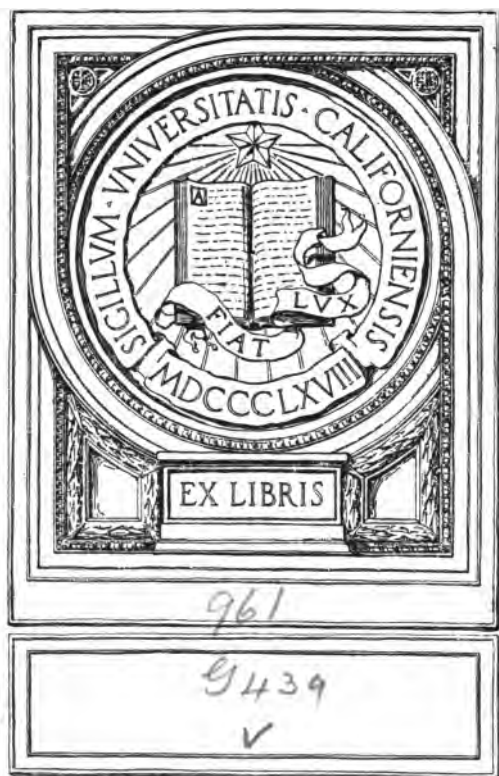
Vrouw Grobelaar

AND HER
LEADING CASES



PERCEVAL GIBSON

18 67458



Vrouw Grobelaar
AND HER LEADING CASES

TO
MY WIFE

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

267701

TO YOU
ALPHABET

VROUW GROBELAAR
and
Her Leading Cases

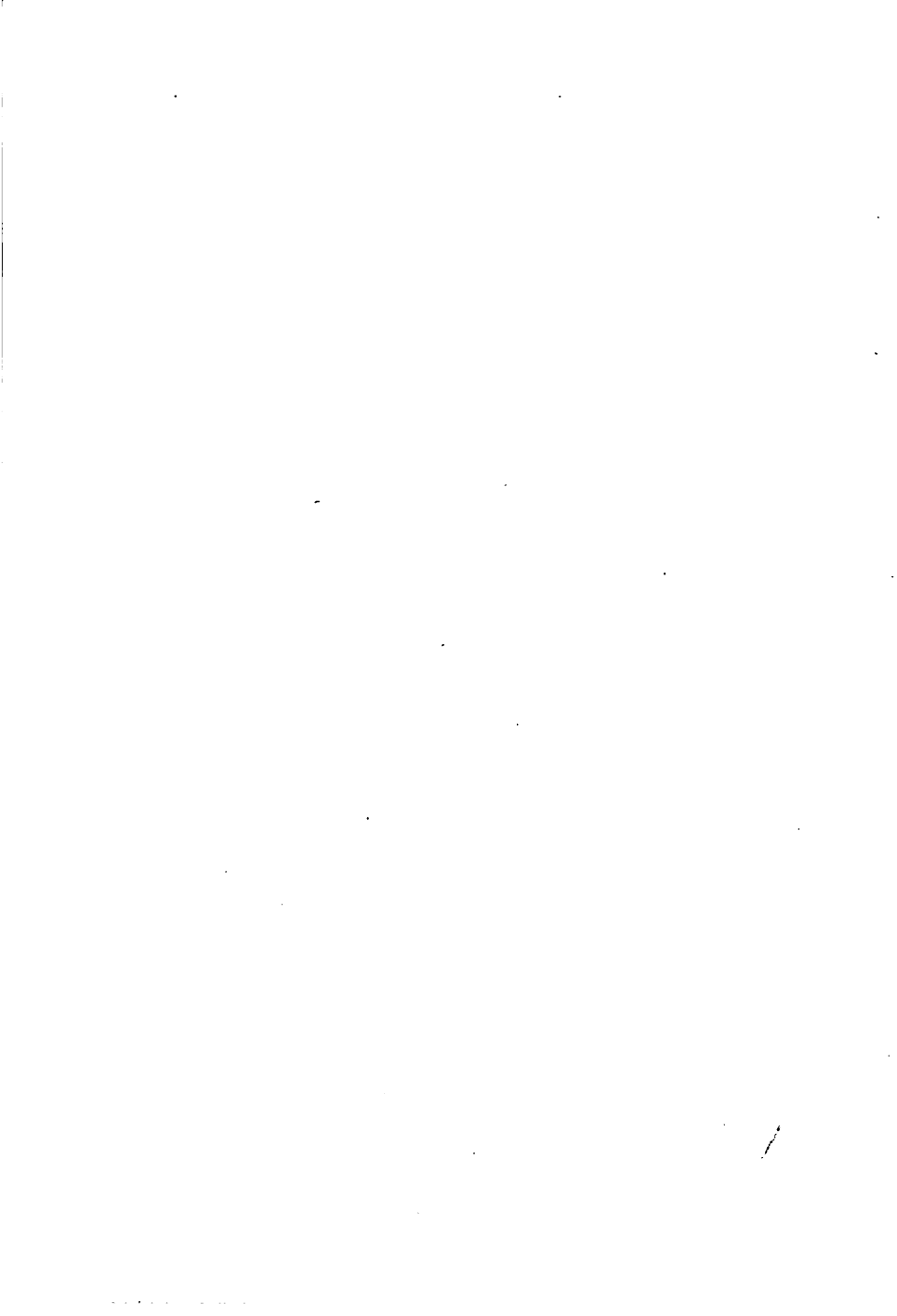
by
Perceval Gibbon

McClure, Phillips & Co.
New York
1906

CONTENTS

	PAGE
UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION	3
THE DREAM-FACE	13
THE AVENGER OF BLOOD	28
THE HANDS OF THE PITIFUL WOMAN	39
PIET NAUDE'S TREK	49
LIKE UNTO LIKE	58
COUNTING THE COLORS	65
THE KING OF THE BABOONS	77
MORDER DRIFT	99
A GOOD END	117
VASCO'S SWEETHEART	130
THE PERUVIAN	142
TAGALASH	156
THE HOME KRAAL	171
THE SACRIFICE	200
THE COWARD	218
HER OWN STORY	245

Vrouw Grobelaar
AND HER LEADING CASES



UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION

THE Vrouw Grobelaar, you must know, is a lady of excellent standing, as much by reason of family connections (for she was a Viljoen of the older stock herself, and buried in her time three husbands of estimable parentage) as of her wealth. Her farms extended from the Ringkop on the one side to the Holgaatspruit on the other, which is more than a day's ride; and her stock appears to be of that ideal species which does not take rinderpest. Her Kafirs were born on the place, and will surely die there, for though the old lady is firmly convinced that she rules them with a rod of iron, the truth is she spoils them atrociously; and were it not that there is an excellent headman to her kraals, the niggers would soon grow pot-bellied in idleness.

The Vrouw Grobelaar is a lady who commands respect. Her face is a portentous mask

TO VIBU
ALMOOTIBU
TALES FROM THE VELDT

of solemnity, and her figure is spacious beyond the average of Dutch ladies, so that certain chairs are tacitly conceded her as a monopoly. The good Vrouw does not read or write, and having never found a need in herself for these arts, is the least thing impatient of those who practise them. The Psalms, however, she appears to know by heart; also other portions of the Bible; and is capable of spitting Scripture at you on the smallest provocation. Indeed she bubbles with morality, and a mention of "the accursed thing" (which would appear to be a genus and not a species, so many articles of human commerce does it embrace) will set her effervescing with mingled blame and exhortation. But if punishment should come in question, as when a Kafir waylaid and slew a chicken of hers, she displays so prolific an invention in excuses, so generous a partiality for mercy, that not the most irate *induna* that ever laid down a law of his own could find a pretext for using the stick.

She lives in her homestead with some half-dozen of nieces, a nephew or two, and a litter

UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION

of grandchildren, who know the old lady to the core, cozen and blarney her as they please, and love her with a perfect unanimity. I think she sometimes blames herself for her tyrannical usage of these innocents, who nevertheless thrive remarkably on it. You can hardly get off your horse at the door without maiming an infant, and you can't throw a stone in any direction without killing a marriageable damsel. They pervade the old place like an atmosphere; the kraals ring with their voices, and the Kafirs spend lives of mingled misery and delight at their irresponsible hands.

I do not think I need particularize in the matter of these youngsters, save as regards Katje. Katje refuses to be ignored, and she was no more to be overlooked than a tin-tack in the sole of your foot. She was the only child of Vrouw Grobelaar's youngest brother, Barend Viljoen, who died while lion-hunting in the Fever Country. At the time I am thinking of Katje might have been eighteen. She was like a poppy among the stubble, so delicate in her bodily fabric, and yet so opulent in shape

TALES FROM THE VELDT

and coloring. She was the nicest child that ever gave a kiss for the asking (you could kiss her as soon as look at her), but she was also the very devil to deal with if she saw fit to take a distaste of you. I saw her once smack a fathom of able-bodied youth on both sides of the head with a lusty vigor that constrained the sufferer to howl. And I have seen her come to meet a man—well, me, with the readiest lips and the friendliest hand in the world. Oh, Katje was like a blotch of color in one's life; something vivid, to throw the days into relief.

A stranger to the household might have put down Katje's behavior towards the Vrouw Grobelaar as damnable, no less; and in the early days of my acquaintance with the family I was somewhat tempted to this opinion myself. For she not only flouted the old lady to her face, but would upon occasion disregard her utterly, and do it all with what I can only call a swagger that seemed to demand a local application of drastic measures. But Katje knew her victim, if such a word can be applied

UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION

to the Vrouw Grobelaar, and never prodded her save on her armor. For instance, to say the Kafirs were overdriven and starved was nothing if not flattery—to say they were spoiled and coddled would have been mere brutality.

With it all, the Vrouw Grobelaar went her placid way, like an elephant over egg-shells. Her household did her one service, at least, in return for their maintenance, and that was to provide the old lady with an audience. It was in no sense an unwilling service, for her imagination ran to the gruesome, and she never planted a precept but she drove it home with a case in point. As a result night was often shattered by a yell from some sleeper whose dreams had trespassed on devilish domains. The Vrouw Grobelaar believed most entirely in Kafir magic, in witchcraft and second sight, in ghosts and infernal possession, in destiny, and in a very personal arch-fiend, who presided over a material hell when not abroad in the world on the war-path. Besides, she had stores of tales from the lives of neighbors and acquaintances: often horrible

TALES FROM THE VELDT

enough, for the Boers are a lonely folk and God's finger writes large in their lives.

I almost think I can see it now—the low Dutch kitchen with its plank ceiling, the old lady in her chair, with an illustrative forefinger uplifted to punctuate the periods of her tale, the embers, white and red, glowing on the hearth, and the intent shadow-pitted faces of the hearers, agape for horrors.

There was a tale I heard her tell to Katje, when that damsel had seen fit to observe, apropos of disobedience in general, that her grandfather's character had nothing to do with hers. The tale was in plaintive Dutch, the language that makes or breaks a story-teller, for you must hang your point on the gutturals or you miss it altogether.

"Look at my husband's uncle," said the old lady. "A sinful man, forever swearing and cursing, and drinking. His farm was the worst in the district; the very Kafirs were ashamed of it when they went to visit the kraals. But Voss (that was the name of my husband's uncle) cared nothing so long as

UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION

there was a horse to ride into the dorp on and some money to buy whiskey with. And he drank so much and carried on so wickedly that his wife died and his girls married poor men and never went to stay with their father. So at last he lived in the house, with only his son to help him from being all alone.

"This son was Barend Voss, a great hulking fellow, with the strength of a trek-ox, and never a word of good or bad to throw away on any one. But his face was the face of a violent man. He had blue eyes with no pleasantness about them, but a sort of glitter, as though there were live coals in his brain. He did not drink like his father; and these two would sit together in the evenings, the one bleared and stupid with liquor, and the other watching him in silence across the table. They spoke seldom to one another; and it would often happen that the father would speak to the son and get not a word of answer—only that lowering ugly stare that had grown to be a way with the boy.

"I think those two men must have grown

TALES FROM THE VELDT

to hate each other in the evenings as they sat together; the younger one despising and loathing his father, and the father hating his son for so doing. I have often wondered how they never came to blows—before they did, that is.

“One morning old Voss rode off to the dorp, and Barend watched him from the door till he went out of sight in the kloof. All the day he was away, and when he came back again it was late in the night. Barend was sitting in his usual place at the table scowling over his folded arms.

“Old Voss had not ridden off his liquor; and he staggered into the house singing a dirty English song. He had a bottle in his hands, and banged it down on the table in front of his son.

“‘Now, old sheep’s head,’ he shouted, ‘have a drink and drop those airs of yours.’

“Barend sat where he was, and said not a word—just watched the other.

“‘Come on,’ shouted old Voss; ‘I’m not going to drink alone. If you won’t take it

UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION

pleasantly I'll make you take it, and be damned to you !'

"Barend sat still, scowling always. I dare say a sober man would have seen something in his eyes and let be. But old Voss was blind to his danger, and shouted on.

"The younger man kept his horrid silence, and never moved, till the father was goaded to a drunken rage.

"'If you won't drink,' he screamed, 'take that,' and he flung a full cupful of the spirit right in the young man's face.

"Then everything was in the fire. The two men fought in the room like beasts, oversetting table and lamp, and stamping into the fire on the hearth. Barend was mad with a passion of long nursing, and hewed with his great fists till the old man fell heavily to the ground, and lay moaning.

"Barend stood over him, glowering. 'Swine!' he said to his father; 'swine and brute! get you out of this house to the veld. You are no father of mine.'

"But the old man was much hurt, and lay

TALES FROM THE VELDT

where he had fallen, groaning as though he had not heard.

“‘I will have you out of this,’ said the son. ‘If you are come to die, die on the road. I had wished you dead for years.’

“So he wound his hand, with the knuckles all over blood, in the old man’s white hair, and threw open the door with his other hand.

“‘Out with you!’ he shouted, and dragged him down the step and into the yard. Yes, he dragged him across the yard to the gate; and when he unfastened the gate the old man opened his eyes and spoke.

“‘Leave me here,’ he said, speaking slowly and painfully. ‘Leave me here, my son. Thus far I dragged my father.’”

* * * * *

The Vrouw Grobelaar, to point a weighty moral, turned her face upon Katje. But that young lady was sleeping soundly with her mouth open.

THE DREAM-FACE

I WISH," said Katje, looking up from her book—"I wish a man would come and make me marry him."

The Vrouw Grobelaar wobbled where she sat with stupefaction.

"Yes," continued Katje, musingly casting her eyes to the rafters, "I wish a man would just take me by the hand—*so*—and not listen to anything I said, nor let me go however I should struggle, and carry me off on the peak of his saddle and marry me. I think I would be willing to die for a man who could do that."

The Vrouw Grobelaar found her voice at last. "Katje," she said with deep-toned emphasis, "you are talking wickedness, just wickedness. Do you think I would let a man—any man, or perhaps an Englishman—carry you off like a strayed ewe?"

"The sort of man I'm thinking of," replied

TALES FROM THE VELDT

the maiden, "wouldn't ask you for permission. He'd simply pick me up, and away he'd go."

At times, and in certain matters, Vrouw Grobelaar would display a ready acumen. "Tell me, Katje," she said now, "who is this man?"

Then Katje dropped her book and, sitting upright with an unimpeachable surprise, stared at the old lady.

"I'm not thinking of any man," she remarked calmly. "I was just wishing there was a man who would have the pluck to do it."

The Vrouw Grobelaar shook her head. "Good Burghers don't carry girls away," she said. "They come and drink coffee, and sit with them, and talk about the sheep."

"And behave as if they had never worn boots before, and didn't know what to do with their hands," added the maiden. "Aunt, am I a girl to marry a man who upsets three cups of coffee in half an hour and borrows a handkerchief to wipe his knees?"

Now there could be no shadow of doubt that

THE DREAM-FACE

this was an open-breasted cut at young Fanie van Tromp, whose affection for Katje was a matter of talk on the farms, and whose overtures that young lady had consistently sterilized with ridicule.

The Vrouw Grobelaar was void of delicacy. "Fanie is a good lad," she said, "and when his father dies he will have a very large property."

"It'll console him for not adding me to his live stock," retorted Katje.

"He is handsome, too," continued the old lady. "His beard is as black as ——"

"A carrion-crow," added Katje promptly.

"Quite," agreed the Vrouw Grobelaar, with a perfect unconsciousness of the unsavoriness of the suggestion.

"And he walks like a duck with sore feet," went on Katje. "He is as graceful as a trek-ox, and his conversational talents are those of a donkey in long grass."

"All that is a young girl's nonsense," observed the old lady. "I was like that once myself. But when one grows a little older and fatter, and there is less about one to take a

TALES FROM THE VELDT

man's eye,—a fickle thing, Katje, a fickle thing,—one looks for more in a husband than a light foot and a smart figure."

Katje was a trifle abashed, for all the daughters of her house, were they never so slender, grew tubby in their twenties.

"Besides," continued the worthy Vrouw, "your talk is chaff from a mill. It must come out to leave the meal clean. Perhaps, after all, Fanie is the man to carry you off. I think you would not take so much trouble to worry him if you thought nothing of him."

The Vrouw Grobelaar had never heard of Beatrice and her Benedick, but she had a notion of the principle.

"I hate him," cried Katje with singular violence.

"I think not," replied the old lady. "Sometimes the thing we want is at our elbows, and we cannot grasp it because we reach too far. Did I ever tell you how Stoffel Struben nearly went mad for love of his wife?"

"No," said Katje, unwillingly interested.

"He was something of a fool to begin with,"

THE DREAM-FACE

commenced the Vrouw Grobelaar. "He chose his wife for a certain quality of gentleness she had, and though I will not deny she made him a good wife and a patient, still gentleness will not boil a pot. He was a fine fellow to look at; big and upstanding, with plenty of blood in him, and a grand mat of black hair on top. He moved like a buck; so ready on his feet and so lively in all his movements. *He* might have carried you off, Katje, and done you no good in the end.

"He was happy with his pretty wife for a while, and might have been happy all his life and died blessedly had he but been able to keep from conjuring up faces in his mind and falling in love with them. Greta, his wife, had hair like golden wheat, so smooth and rippled with light; and no sooner had he stroked his fill of it than he conceived nut-brown to be the most lovely color of woman's hair. Her eyes were blue, and for half a year he loved them; then hazel seemed to him a better sort. I said he was a fool, didn't I?

"So his marriage to Greta became a chain

TALES FROM THE VELDT

instead of a union, while the poor lass fretted her heart out over his dark looks and short answers. He was shallow, Katje, shallow ; he had the mere capacity for love, but it was a short way to the bottom of it. You will see by and by that the men who deserve least always want most. Stoffel had no right to a woman at all ; when he had one, and she a good girl, he let his eyes rove for others.

“So he went about his farm with his mind straying and his heart abroad. If you spoke to him, he paused awhile, and then looked at you with a start as though freshly waked. He saw nothing as he went, neither his wife with the questions in her eyes that she shamed to say with her lips, nor the child that crowed at him from her arms. He was deaf and blind to the healthy world, to all save the silly dreams his poisoned soul fed on.

“Well, wicked or not, it is at least unsafe not to look where one is going. This was a thing Stoffel never did : since he overlooked his wife, it was not to be expected he would see a strand of fencing-wire on the ground. So he

THE DREAM-FACE

rode on to it, and down came his horse. Down came Stoffel too, and there was a stone handy on the place where his head lit to let some of the moonshine out of him. He saw a heavenful of stars for a moment, and then saw nothing for a long time. Save—one strange thing !

“When life came back to him he was in his bed very sore and empty, and very mightily surprised to see himself alive, after all. He was exceedingly weak and somewhat misty as to how it all had happened. But one thing he seemed to remember—more than seemed, so strong, so plain, so deep was his memory of it. He thought he recalled pain and blindness, and a sudden light, in which he saw a face close to his, a girl’s face, pitiful, tender, loving, and charged with more than all the sweetness of beauty that his sick heart could long for. The thing was like one of those dreams from which one wakes sad and thoughtful, as when one has overstepped the boundary mark of life and cast an eye on heaven.

“It was no face that he knew, and he turned

TALES FROM THE VELDT

on his pillow to think of it. He could not believe it was a dream. 'It was a soul,' he said to himself. 'I knew, I was sure, that somewhere there was such a face, but it only came to my eyes when I was on the borderland of death. If ever God gave a thing to a mortal man, he should have given me that woman.'

"So with such blasphemous thoughts he idled through the days of his sickness, very quiet, very weak, and kind to his wife beyond the ordinary. Of course she, poor woman, knew nothing of the silly tale, and when her husband gave her those little caresses one would not withhold from an affectionate dog, she blessed God that he was come to himself again. You see, Katje dear, that as a man demands more than he can claim with right, a woman must often make shift with less. It is well to learn this early.

"Stoffel grew well in time, and got about again. But the stone had made less of a dent in his skull than the face in his heart, and he was changed altogether. He served a false god, but served it faithfully. He was very

THE DREAM-FACE

gentle and patient with every one, almost like a saint, and he took infinite pains with the work of his farm. He would hurt no living thing—not even so much as lash a team of lazy oxen. You would have thought Kafirs would have done as they pleased with him, but they obeyed his least word, and hung on his eyes for orders as though they worshipped him. Kafirs and dogs will sometimes see farther than a Christian.

“Meanwhile Greta came to die. It was a chill, perhaps, with a trifle of fever on top of that, and it carried her off like a candle-flame when it is blown out. She died well—very well indeed. None of your whimpering and moaning and slinking out of the back-door of life when nobody is looking; nor that unconscious death that shuts out a chance of a few last words. No; Greta saw with her eyes and spoke with her mouth to the last, then folded her hands and died as handsomely as one would wish to see. She prayed a trifle, as she should; forgave her brother’s wife for speaking ill of her, and hoped her tongue would not lure

TALES FROM THE VELDT

her to destruction. I have heard her brother's wife never forgave her for it.

"On the last day she sent everybody out of the room save only Stoffel, and him she held by the hand as he sat beside the bed. She knew she was drawing to her end (the dying always know it) and feared nothing. But there was a matter she wanted to know.

" 'Stoffel,' she said when they were alone, 'won't you tell me now who that woman is?'

" 'What woman?' said Stoffel amazed, for of his dream in his sickness he had spoken to no living soul.

"She stroked his hand and shook her head at him. 'Ah, Stoffel,' she said, 'it is long since I first made place for that woman, and if I grudged her you, I never grudged you her. I was content with what you gave me, Stoffel; I thought you right, whatever you did, and I go to God still thinking so. All our life, Stoffel, she prevailed against me, and I submitted; but *now*, at this last moment, I want to have the better of it. Tell me, who was it?'

THE DREAM-FACE

“And Stoffel, looking on the floor, answered, ‘I swear to you there was no woman.’

“She replied, ‘And ere the cock crows thou shalt deny me thrice.’ She turned her head and looked at him with a pitiful drawn smile that would have dragged tears from a demon. ‘Was she dark, Stoffel? I am fair, you know; but my hair—look at it, Stoffel,—my hair is golden. Did you never notice it before? She was tall, I suppose? Well, I am something short, but, Stoffel, I am slender, too. Will you not so much as tell me her name, Stoffel? It is not as if I blamed you.’

“A truth, hardly won, is always set on a pile of lies. ‘How do you know there was a woman?’ asked Stoffel.

“‘How!’ she repeated. ‘How I know! Stoffel, you never had a thought I did not know; never a hope but I hoped it for you, nor a fear but I thought how to safeguard you. I never lived but in you, Stoffel.

“‘Let us speak nothing but the truth now,’ she went on. ‘You and I have always been beyond the need for lies to one another, and as I

TALES FROM THE VELDT

wait here for you to tell me, I have one hand in yours and the other in Christ's. Let me not think hardly of her as I go.'

" 'You would not curse her?' he said quickly.

" 'Not even that,' she answered, smiling a little. 'And if you will not tell me, I will die even content with that, since it is your wish.'

" 'Listen,' said Stoffel then. And forthwith, looking backwards and forwards in shame and sorrow, he told the tale. He told how he saw a face, which laid hold on his life ever after, how it governed and compelled him with the mere memory, and hung in his mind like a deed done. And he also told how he hoped after death to see that face with the eyes of his soul, and dwell with it in heaven.

"When he had finished he cast a glance at his wife. She was lying on her back, holding his hand still, and smiling up to the ceiling with a pleasant face of contentment.

" 'Can you forgive me?' he cried, and would have gone on to protest and explain, but she pressed his hand and he was silent.

" 'Forgive you!' she said at last. 'Forgive

THE DREAM-FACE

you! No; but I will bless you for all of it. So it seems I have won after all, but now I wish I had let be. It was no spirit you saw, Stoffel. There was a woman there, and while you lay white and lifeless she held you in her arms, and bent over you. And just for one moment you opened your eyes and saw her, while her face was close to yours. Then you died again, and remained so for a day and a night. Was there love in her eyes, Stoffel?’

“ ‘Love!’ cried Stoffel, and fell silent.

“In a minute he spoke again. ‘I am helpless,’ he said, ‘and you are strong. But, curse and hate me as you will, you must tell me who this woman was.’

“ ‘A little time since it was I that asked,’ she said, ‘and you would not tell me.’

“ ‘I beseech you,’ he said.

“ ‘You shall never ask twice,’ she answered gently. ‘I will tell you, but not this moment.’

“So for a while they sat together, and the sun began to go down, and blazed on the window-panes and on the golden hair of the dying woman. She lay as if in a mist of glory, and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

smiled at Stoffel. He, looking at her, could not lack of being startled by the beauty that had come over her face and the joy that weighed her eyelids.

"She stirred a little, and sighed. Stoffel cast an arm round her to hold her up, and his heart bounded woefully when he felt how light she was. Her head came to his shoulder, as to a place where it belonged, and their lips met.

"‘Shall I tell you now?’ she said in a whisper.

"Stoffel did not answer, so she asked again. ‘Will you know, Stoffel?’

"‘No,’ he answered. ‘I’m cured.’

"‘I will tell you, then,’ she cried.

"‘No,’ he repeated. ‘Let it be.’

"So together they sat for a further while, and the time grew on for going. She was to die with the sun; she had said it. And as they sat both could see through the window the sun floating lower, with an edge in its grave already, and the rim of the earth black against it. The noises of the veld and the farm came in to them, and they drew closer together.

THE DREAM-FACE

“Neither wept; they were too newly met for that. But Stoffel felt a dull pain of sorrow overmastering him, and soon he groaned aloud.

“‘My wife, my wife,’ he cried.

“She rested wholly on his arm, and shivered a little.

“‘Stoffel,’ she said in a voice that henceforth was to whisper forever, ‘Stoffel, you love me?’

“‘As God sees me,’ he answered.

“‘Listen,’ she said, and fought with the tide that was fast drowning her words. ‘*That face—you—saw . . . was . . . mine!*’

“She smiled as his arm tightened on her, and died so smiling.”

* * * * *

There was silence in the shadowy room as the tale finished, until it was broken by the Vrouw Grobelaar.

“You see?” she said.

“Yes,” replied Katje, very quietly.

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD

THE Vrouw Grobelaar entered in haste, closed the door, and sat down panting.

"If my last husband were alive," she said—"if *any* of them were alive, that creature would be shot for looking at an honest woman with such eyes," and she cast an anxious glance over her shoulder.

"What is it?" demanded Katje.

"That old Hottentot hag," responded the old lady. "She looks like a witch, and I am sure she is a witch. I would make the Kafirs throw her on to the veld, but you can't be too careful with witches. Why, as I came in just now, she was squatting by the door like a big toad, and her eyes made me go cold all through."

Katje made a remark.

"What! You say nonsense!" The old lady pricked herself into an ominous majesty. "Nonsense, indeed! Katje, beware of pride.

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD

Beware of puffing yourself up. Aren't there witches in the Bible, and weren't they horrible and wicked? Didn't King David see the dead corpses come up out of the ground when the witch crooked her finger, like dogs running to heel? Well, then!

"Oh, I know," continued the old lady, as Katje tossed a mutinous head. "They've taught you a lot in that school, but they didn't teach you belief. Nor manners. You're going to say there are no witches nowadays."

"I'm not," said Katje.

"Yes, you are," pursued the Vrouw Grobelaar. "I know you. But you're wrong. You don't know anything. Young girls in these days are like young pigs, all squeak and fight, but no bacon. Didn't the brother of my half-brother's wife die of a witch's devilry?"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned hapless Katje.

"Well, he did. I'll tell you." The old lady settled herself comfortably and lapsed into history.

"His name was Fanie, and he was a Van

TALES FROM THE VELDT

der Merwe on his father's side, but his mother was only a Prinsloo, though *her* mother was a Coetzee, for the matter of that. He wasn't what I should call good—at least, not always; but he was very big and strong, and made a lot of noise, and folk liked him. The women used to make black white to prove that the things he did and said were proper things, although they'd have screamed all night if their own men-folk had done the same. They say, you know," said the Vrouw Grobelaar, quoting a very old and seldom-heard Dutch proverb, "that when women pray they think of God as a handsome man.

"What I didn't like about him was his way with the Kafirs. A Kafir is more useful than a dog after all, and one shouldn't be always beating and kicking even a dog. And Fanie could never pass a Kafir without kicking him or flicking his whip at him. I have seen all the Kafirs run to their kraals when they saw him riding up the road.

"There was one old Kafir we had,—very old and weak, and no use at all. He used to sit

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD

by the gate all day, and mumble to himself, and seem to look at things that weren't there. His head was quite white with age, which is not a common thing with Kafirs, as you know ; and he was so foolish and helpless that his people used to feed him with a spiked stick, like a motherless chicken. And in case the fowls should go and sit on his back while he crouched in the sun, as I have seen them do, there was a little Kafir picaninny, as black as a crow, that was sent to play about near him every day. Dear Lord ! I have seen those two sitting there, looking at each other for an hour on end, without a word, as though both had been children or both old men. Nobody minded them : we used to throw sugar to the picaninny, and watch him fighting with the fowls for it, rolling about on his little black belly like a new-hatched duckling himself.

“ Well, Fanie, . . . it was horrible. . . . I don't like to think of it to this day. He came over one day in a great hurry to tell us that August de Villiers, the father of the Predikant at Dopfontein, was choked with a peach-stone.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

He was riding very fast, and as he came near the house he rode off the road and jumped his horse at the wall. And as he came over, up rose the little picaninny right under his horse's hoofs. 'Twas a quick way to die, and without much pain, no doubt; but a most awful thing to see. The horse stumbled on to him, and I can remember now how his knee, the near knee, crushed the little Kafir's chest in. The little black legs and arms fought for a moment, and then the horse struggled up, and he was dead.

"Fanie seemed sorry. He couldn't help killing the picaninny, of course, and perhaps we had grown rather foolish about him, having watched him and laughed at him so long. So Fanie got off his horse and came in to tell us the news.

"When we went out the horse was standing at the door where Fanie had left it. But the old Kafir was kneeling by the steps fingering its hoofs, which were all bloody, and as Fanie came forward he put out his hands and left a little spot of blood on Fanie's shoes.

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD

"Fanie stood for a moment, and his face went white as paper over his black beard. He knew, you see. But in a flash he went red as fire, and lashed the old man across the face with his whip. The old man did not move at all; but my brothers held Fanie and called to the Kafirs to come and fetch the old man away. Oh, but I promise you Fanie was angry, as men will be when they are obliged to be good by force.

"Well, that was all that happened that day. Fanie went away, and we all saw that he galloped the horse as fast as it could go. But down by the kraals the Kafirs who were carrying the old man stopped and watched him as he went.

"Well, in a few days most of us forgot the ugly business, though the little picaninny used to walk through my dreams for a time. Still, blood-kin are blood-kin, and Kafirs are Kafirs, and one day Fanie came over to see us again and we gave him coffee. He told us a story about a rooinek that bought a sheep, and the man gave him a dog in a sack, and he paid for

TALES FROM THE VELDT

it and went away, and we all laughed at it. He was very funny that day, and said that when he married he would choose an old woman who would die quickly and leave him all her farms. So it was late and dark before he up-saddled to go away.

"Well, he was gone a quarter of an hour when we heard hoofs, galloping, galloping, hard and furious, coming up the road. And as we opened the door a horse came over the wall and Fanie tumbled off it and came rushing in.

"We all screamed. He was white like ashes, and wet with sweat, and trembling so that he could not stand.

" 'Fanie,' cried my sister, 'what is it?' and he groaned and put his face in his hands.

"By and by he spoke, and kept glancing about him and turning to look behind him, and would not let one of us move away.

" 'There was something behind me,' he said.

" 'Something?' we all asked.

" 'Yes,' he said. 'Something . . . dead! It followed me up here, and I could not get

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD

away from it, spur as hard as I would. I think it is a death-call.'

"Then we were all frightened, but we could not help wanting to hear more.

"'No,' said Fanie, 'I did not see it, nor hear it even, but I knew it was there.'

"'It was a sign,' said my mother, a very wise old woman. 'Let us all thank God.'

"So we thanked God on our knees, but I'm sure I don't know what for.

"Then Fanie told us all he knew, and that was just nothing. As he came to the kloof he was afraid of something in front of him. He said he felt like a man in grave-clothes. So he turned, and then the . . . whatever it was . . . seemed to come after him; so he galloped and galloped as hard as the horse could lay hoof to the earth, and prayed till his heart nearly burst. And then, not knowing where he was going, he jumped the wall and came among us. We were all silent when he had told us.

"Then Oom Jan spoke. He was very old, and seldom said anything.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“ ‘ You have done murder ! ’ he said.

“ If I talk till my mouth is stopped with dust I shall never be able to tell how cold I felt about the heart when I heard that. For the little picaninny came plain before my eyes, and oh ! I was all full of pity for Fanie. I liked him well enough in those days.

“ He stopped with us that night. He would not go away nor be alone, so he slept with my brothers, and held their hands and prayed half the night. In the morning they took him home on one of our horses, for his own was fit to die from the night’s work.

“ That was the last I ever saw of Fanie. It was as though he went from us to God. He kissed me on both cheeks when he went away ; he kissed us all, but me first of all, and held both my hands. I think he must have liked me too,—don’t you think so, Katje ? ”

“ Yes,” said Katje softly.

“ He went down the road between my brothers with his head bent like an old man’s, and I watched him out of sight, and I was very,

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD

very sorry for him. I don't think I cried, but I may have. He was a fine tall man.

"One night my brothers came in just as I was going to bed, and one stood in the door while the other whispered to my mother. She looked up and saw me standing there.

" 'Go to bed,' she said.

" 'What is it?' I asked.

" 'Go to bed,' said my brother.

" 'No,' I said. 'Tell me, is it Fanie?'

"My brother looked at me and threw up his hand like a man who can do no more. 'Yes,' he said.

"Then I knew, as though he had shouted it out, that Fanie was dead. I cannot say how, but I knew it.

" 'He is dead,' I said. 'Bring him in here.'

"So they went out and carried Fanie in with his clothes all draggled and his beard full of mud. They laid him on the table, and I saw his face. . . . Dear God! . . . There was terror on that face, carven and set in dead flesh, that set my blood screaming in my body.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

Sometimes even now I wake in the night all shrinking with fear of the very memory of it.

"But there is one thing more. We went about to put everything in order and lay the poor corpse in decency, and when we started to pull off his veldschoen, as I hope to die in my bed, there was a *little drop of blood* still wet on the toe.

"I think God's right hand was on my head that night that I did not go mad.

"I heard the tale next morning. My brothers, coming home, found him . . . it . . . in a spruit, already quite dead. There was no horse by, but his spoor led back a mile to where the horse lay dead and stiff. When it fell he must have run on, . . . screaming, perhaps, . . . till he fell in the spruit. I would like to think peace came to him at the last; but there was no peace in the dead face."

The Vrouw Grobelaar dropped her face on to her hands, and Katje came and passed an arm of sympathy and protection around her.

THE HANDS OF THE PITIFUL WOMAN

THE Vrouw Grobelaar had no opinion of Kafirs, and was forever ready to justify herself in this particular.

“Kafirs,” she said, “are *not* men, whatever the German missionaries may say. I do not deny we have a duty to them, as to the beasts of the field ; but as for being men, well, a baboon is as much a man as a Kafir is.

“Kafirs are made to work, and ought to work. Katje, what are you laughing about? Did not the dear God make everything for a purpose, and what is the use of a Kafir if he is not made to work? Work for themselves? Katje, you are learning nothing but rubbish at that school, and I will not have you say such things. How could the Burghers work the farms if they had not the Kafirs? Well, be silent, then.

“Oh, I know the Kafirs. I have seen hundreds of them—yes, and for the matter of that,

TALES FROM THE VELDT

thousands. Just beasts, they are,—nothing else. Did you hear how the Vrouw Coetzee came to die? Well, I will tell you, and you will see that we must hold the Kafirs with a hand of iron or they will destroy us.

“It was a time when Piet Coetzee was away making laws in Pretoria, and the Vrouw Coetzee, who was only married one year, was alone on the farm with her little baby. There were plenty of Kafirs to do the work; but, you see, there was no man to have an eye to them, and take a sjambok to them when they needed it. So one day the Kafirs came in from the lands and would not work any more.

“Why wouldn't they work? How should I know? Who can tell why a Kafir does anything? Perhaps a witch-doctor had come among them. Perhaps the German missionaries had been talking foolishness to them. Perhaps it began at a beer-drink with some boasting by the young men before the girls. Who can say? But however it was, they came in and sat down before the house, and just waited there.

THE HANDS OF THE PITIFUL WOMAN

“Vrouw Coetzee came out with her baby on her arm and spoke to them ; but not one moved a finger or answered a word. They sat still where they were and watched her, and others came from the huts and sat down too, until there were close on a hundred Kafirs before the house. Vrouw Coetzee watched them come, and as she stood in the door the two Kafir girls who worked about the house pushed her aside and went and sat down too.

“Then Vrouw Coetzee, looking at the dumb black faces and white eyes, got frightened and went backwards into the house and closed the door. She put down the baby and drew the iron bar across the door inside. From there she went to the door at the back, and to all the windows, and closed and secured them as far as possible. Then she took down the old elephant-gun from the wall, and finding Piet’s pouch and the bullets, she loaded it and laid it on the table. All the time the Kafirs made no sign, and from the keyhole she saw them still sitting in silence, watching the house.

“When midday came she made some food

TALES FROM THE VELDT

ready to eat, and then came a bang at the door.

“‘What is it you want?’ she cried, without opening.

“‘Liquor!’ cried one of the Kafirs. ‘You have some brandy in the house. Give it to us, or we will come and take it and kill you at the same time.’

“‘I have no brandy,’ she cried, ‘and when my husband comes back I will tell him to shoot you all.’

“The Kafirs laughed, and one of the house-girls called out, ‘There is brandy; we have seen it.’

“Then the Kafirs all began to shout together, and banged the door with their knobkerries. ‘Give us the brandy!’ they shouted, and she heard a stone smash through a window against the shutters.

“The Vrouw Coetzee was a brave woman, and she hated Kafirs; but, looking at the baby, she thought it best to give them the brandy.

“‘Stand away from the window,’ she cried,

THE HANDS OF THE PITIFUL WOMAN

‘and I will put the brandy outside ; but if one of you comes near me I will shoot.’

“So she placed the brandy on the sill outside the window. The Kafirs were standing about in groups, looking very fierce, but they saw the elephant-gun and did nothing. But as she barred the shutter again, she heard them rush up and snatch the bottles.

“Watching through the keyhole of the door, she saw them troop off to the huts, shouting and capering and waving the bottles in the air. They came to the door no more that day, but she heard them howling in the kraal as the brandy began to inflame them.

“When it got dark she sat down with her face to the door, her child in her arms. The howling of the Kafirs was wilder than ever, and shrieks of women mingled with the uproar. The Vrouw Coetzee trembled there in the dark as she remembered stories of the Kafir wars, and how the Kafirs had treated the white women and children they caught on the farms.

“Late in the night the Kafirs came back and commenced to hammer on the door again.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“ ‘Give us more brandy,’ they shouted

“ ‘I have no more,’ she said. ‘I have given you all.’

“ ‘You lie!’ they screamed. ‘If you do not give us more we will come and kill you and tear your baby to pieces.’

“Then the Vrouw Coetzee began to tremble, and, putting down the child, took the big gun in her hands.

“ ‘That is you, Kleinbooi,’ she cried out, recognizing the voice of one of the Kafirs. ‘Why do you behave like this? What will the baas say when he comes back?’

“ ‘We do not care for the baas,’ they replied. ‘If you do not give us the brandy we will break in your door.’

“ ‘I have no more,’ she said again, and straightway the Kafirs commenced to hammer at the door.

“The Vrouw Coetzee raised the gun to her shoulder and pointed it at the door. Her arms were trembling so that she could not keep it steady; so, going close up to the door, she rested the muzzle on the iron bar. Then she pulled the trigger.

THE HANDS OF THE PITIFUL WOMAN

“The gun went off with a roar and filled the room with a stifling smoke. The baby began to cry, but she paid it no attention till the gun was loaded again. Then, as she snatched up her child and soothed it, she heard wailing and screaming from outside, where the heavy bullet had done its work.

“The Kafirs left her at peace for about an hour, and the noise of the wounded sank to a sobbing. At last a voice hailed her again.

“‘We will kill you now,’ it said. ‘You have shot two men,’ and she was assailed with a string of horrid names such as only a Kafir can think of.

“‘Where are you?’ she called, terrified.

“‘Here,’ came the reply, and a little stone fell down the chimney.

“‘I will shoot!’ she screamed, taking up the gun; but the Kafir on the roof answered with only a laugh.

“‘It will do no good,’ he replied. ‘We shall kill you, burn you in a fire slowly, scald you with boiling water, cut you in little pieces,’ and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

he went on to threaten the lone woman with the most fiendish and ghastly outrages, such as I dare not even give a name to.

“The low devilish voice on the roof went on. ‘And your baby, vile thing! You shall see it writhe in the flames, and hear it cry to you, and watch the blood spout from its skin. You shall see the dogs tearing it, while you lie in anguish, powerless to aid it. Yes, we will kill the child first, and slowly—slowly! It shall cry a long time before it shall die at last.’

“Then the Vrouw Coetzee, calling aloud on God, pointed the gun and fired through the roof. There was a laugh again, and before the smoke cleared a big Kafir dropped down the wide chimney and rushed at her.

“Her gun was empty, but the Vrouw Coetzee was the worthy wife of a good Boer, and she raised the heavy weapon and struck him down. He rolled, face upward, on the floor, and as he lay she struck him again. He kicked once or twice with his legs and clutched with his hands; and then he lay still and died.

“It was their plan, you see, that she should

THE HANDS OF THE PITIFUL WOMAN

fire off her gun and then be taken before she had time to recharge it.

“‘Have you got the woman, Martinus?’ called a Kafir from outside.

“‘No,’ cried the Vrouw Coetzee; ‘Martinus has not got the woman, for I have killed him. Who comes next?’

“There was a while of silence then, till she heard them moving about again and talking among themselves. Not daring to think what they would do next, she stood hearkening, with the great gun on her arm. At length came a sound that froze the blood in her body. She heard the sheet-iron on the roof grate as it was dragged off. Then she dropped the gun at her feet and knew that her time was come.

“I cannot tell you in so many words what she did in the next minutes, for my tongue refuses the tale. But the Kafirs did not get into the house. By this time the news of their doings was gone abroad, and as the roof was being taken off the house, some Burghers arrived with guns, and with them my husband. Of course they shot most of the Kafirs that they

could find, and then, being unable to get any answer to their shouts, they broke in the door of the house and entered.

“My husband used to weep as he told of what they found. The Vrouw Coetzee was sitting in a chair, smiling with her eyes closed, and her baby was lying in the crutch of her left arm. Her right hand was on his little soft throat—his face blue and swollen, and his little arms stretched out with tight closed fists. He was quite dead, but warm yet, *for he had missed life by but a few minutes.*

“No, the Vrouw Coetzee was not dead. She died a year after; but all that while she went witless, always smiling and seeming to look for something.

“So you see that, after all, a Kafir is—Katje, what are you crying about?”

PIET NAUDE'S TREK

ON Sunday afternoons the Vrouw Grobelaar's household gave itself up, unwillingly enough, to religious exercises.

The girls retired to their rooms in company with the works of certain well-meaning but inexpressibly dreary authors, and it is to be inferred they read them with profit. The children sat around the big room with Bibles, their task being to learn by heart one of the eight-verse articulations of the 119th Psalm, while the old lady meditated in her armchair and maintained discipline. Those were stern times for the young students: to fidget in one's seat was to court calamity; even to scratch oneself was a risky experiment. David got little credit as a bard in that assembly.

But the work once done, the stumbling recitation dared and achieved, there were compensations, for the Vrouw Grobelaar was then approachable for a story. To be sure, the Sunday afternoon stories were known to all the children

almost by heart, but what good tale will not bear repetition? The history of Piet Naude's Trek was an evergreen favorite, and bore a weighty moral.

The old lady began this story in the only possible way. "Once upon a time, long before the Boers came to the Transvaal, there lived a man named Piet Naude. He was a tall, strong Burgher, with a long beard that swept down to his waist, and a moustache like bright gold that drooped lower than his chin. His eye was so clear that he could see the legs of a galloping buck a mile away; his hand was so sure that he never wasted a bullet; and his heart was so good and true that all the Burghers loved him and followed him in whatever he did.

"Well, when the English came to the Burghers and wanted them to pay taxes for their farms that they had won in battle from the Kafirs, all the men in Piet Naude's country were very angry and said, 'Let us take our guns and shoot the English into the sea, so that the land will be clear of them.' Everybody was willing, and but for Piet Naude there

PIET NAUDE'S TREK

would have been a great and bloody war, and all the English would have been killed.

“But Piet Naude said, ‘Brothers, have patience. When we fought the Kafirs we beat them, but many of us were killed also. If we fight the English, many more will be killed, and we are not too many now. But I will tell you what we will do. We will not pay this tax. We will inspan our oxen and load up our wagons, and we will take our sheep and our cattle and our horses, and trek to the north until we find a place where we can live in peace; and thus we shall have a country of our own and pay no taxes to anybody.’

“As soon as the Burghers heard this they were agreed, and chose out Piet Naude to lead them to the new country. So when the English came to collect the tax they found nobody to pay, but only an empty country, with trampled cornlands and burned homesteads, and wild Kafirs living in the kraals.

“But Piet Naude and his Burghers trekked steadily on with the wagons and the cattle,—sometimes through a fine level country full of

TALES FROM THE VELDT

water and game, and sometimes through a savage wilderness of rocks and dangerous beasts. The sun scorched them by day and the mists froze them by night; some died by the way, and some were killed by lions, and some bitten by snakes. But month after month they held on, crawling slowly over the desolate face of that great new country, till at length the ragged weary men cried out and said they would go no farther.

“‘Let us go back to the grass-lands and water,’ they said, ‘and let us live there, else we shall die, forgotten of God, in this inhospitable wilderness.’ But Piet Naude wrought with them, saying, ‘Let us keep good hearts and hold on. In time we shall surely come to the best place of all, where we shall gain cattle and sheep and prosper all our lives.’ And after he had talked with them for a long time, and shamed them with their weakness, they were persuaded, and once again they faced the great unknown country and trekked on.

“But one hot day one of the Burghers who had ridden away to look for meat came gallop-

PIET NAUDE'S TREK

ing back. 'Over yonder,' he said, pointing with his hand, 'there is a wide kloof, with a stream in it. There is grass there as long and thick as the best pasture of our farms, with trees and wild fruit, and everything plentiful and beautiful. Without doubt it will lead us to such a place as we have been seeking.'

"So the wagons were turned aside, and they went forward to the kloof, all the Burghers uplifted with hope, and the very oxen pulling their best. But Piet Naude said nothing, for he had a strange doubt in his heart, and he rode on anxiously. And when they came to the kloof they saw that all the Burgher had said was even less than true. The veld underfoot was soft and tender as satin, and the grass was fresh and green. On each side the tall hills cast back the sun, so that the beautiful cool shade fell like a blessing on their scorched faces. There was wild hemp (*dagga*) for the Kafirs to smoke; and wild apricots running over the stones; water splashing, clear and fresh, beside the way; mimosa-trees to give wood for the fires; and everywhere they saw the spoor of

TALES FROM THE VELDT

every kind of buck. The Burghers were overwhelmed with gladness, and pushed on gaily.

“On the next day the kloof widened out, and they came forth into a most wonderful plain girt round with steep cliffs, and all overgrown with grass and trees. At a little distance they saw cattle grazing wild, and big herds of buck roaming in the open. Birds started without fear from under their feet, and in the streams fish swam plain to see.

“Then Piet Naude said, ‘Brothers, let us go away from this place. I am afraid of all I see. God did not send all this wealth easy to our hands at no cost of labor. Let us go away lest we be entrapped into some devilishness.’ But the others laughed him down and would not listen to him, saying his brain was rotten in his head with the long trek and the sun.

“So there they stayed and built themselves houses and kraals, and set about gathering the hay and catching cattle. But everything fell out so easily and all they needed came so plentifully that there grew over them a sort of

PIET NAUDE'S TREK

sloth, and they slept without shame in the hours of work, and gave no attention to the future.

“Then by degrees it began to be noticed that they were growing fat. Soon they had bellies like sows, and their necks and their limbs became so great that they were obliged to go about without clothes, like the wild Kafirs and the brutes that perish. And when one of them would lie down, his fatness so burdened him that without help he could scarcely rise to his feet. None were spared: even the godly Piet Naude was as great as an ox; but the difference was, he felt shame for it all, whereas the others felt none.

“Many a time he implored them to inspan and leave the place; but each time they cried him down. And when he said he would go himself, they reminded him that it was he who had urged them to trek, and asked him if he would now desert them. So for a while he stayed.

“But at length he resolved he would no longer be bound, and he called to know who would go with him. But as he spoke a storm

came up, and the wind screamed and the rain threshed, and the poor fat creatures waddled off to their houses, and of all that people only one stayed to go with Piet Naude. It was a young Burgher whose name was Hendrik Van der Merwe, a decent lad; and the two set off together.

“But when they came to the beautiful kloof they were amazed at the work of the storm. The wind had torn great boulders from the hills and rolled them down; and the rain had churned the earth into mud, and washed the roots of the trees loose; so that where everything had once been so fair and orderly there was now a crazy wilderness of rocks and thorns and mud.

“But they breasted the obstacles gallantly, those two alone; and at hazard of their lives they climbed over and under great rocking crags, cutting their hands and tearing their feet with the sharp stones and the thorns of the mimosas. But as they went they saw with delight that their fatness dwindled from them, and their limbs fell back to their old shapeliness,

PIET NAUDE'S TREK

while the blubber on their cheeks retreated from their eyes and left them free as before.

"So after three days of climbing and slipping and scrambling, the rain and the wind ceased, and they came forth into the country beyond, tall and slender as they were before."

This, in reality, is the end of the story, but the children are wont to ask in chorus what the two heroes did next.

"They went back," says Vrouw Grobelaar, omitting all details of how the return was accomplished; "and when the Burghers went forth on the Great Trek, they went with them, and lived long, had many children, and then died happy and were buried."

"And what is the moral?" asked little Koos, who supplies the part of the Greek chorus.

"The moral," replies the old lady in her most impressive manner, "is that you should obey your elders, learn your psalms, get up early, shut the door after you, tell the truth, and blow your nose."

It will thus be seen that for a truly comprehensive parable the above would be hard to beat.

LIKE UNTO LIKE

FOR the most part the Vrouw Grobelaar's nephews and nieces were punctually obedient. Doubtless this was policy ; for the old lady founded her authority on a generous complement of this world's goods. However, man is as the grass of the field (as she would constantly aver); and it fell that Frikkie Viljoen, otherwise a lad of promise, became enamored of a girl of lower caste than the Grobelaars and Viljoens, and this, mark you, with a serious eye to marriage. Even this, after a proper and orthodox reluctance on the part of his elders and betters, might have been condoned ; for the Viljoens had multiplied exceedingly in the land, and the older sons were not yet married. But, as though to aggravate the business, Frikkie took a sort of glory in it, and openly belauded his lowly sweetheart.

“Mark you,” said the Vrouw Grobelaar with tremendous solemnity, “this choice is your own.

LIKE UNTO LIKE

Take care you do not find a Leah in your Rachel."

Frikkie replied openly that he was sure enough about the girl.

The Vrouw Grobelaar shook a doubtful head. "Her grandfather was a *bijwohner*," she said. "Pas op! or she will one day go back to her own people and shame you."

The misguided Frikkie saw fit to laugh at this.

"Oh, you may laugh! You may laugh, and laugh, until your time comes for weeping. I tell you, she will one day return to her own people, *bijwohners* and rascals all of them, as Stoffel Mostert's wife did."

The old lady paused, and Frikkie defiantly demanded further particulars.

"Yes," continued the Vrouw Grobelaar, "I remember all the disgrace and shame of it to this day, and how poor Stoffel went about with his head bowed and looked no one in the face.

"He had a farm under the Hangklip, and a very nice farm it was, with two wells and a big dam right up above the lands, so that he had no

TALES FROM THE VELDT

need for a windmill to carry his water. If he had stuck to the farm Stoffel might have been a rich man ; and perhaps, when he was old enough to be listened to, the Burghers might have made him a feldkornet.

“ But no ! He must needs cast his eyes about him till they fell on one Katrina Ruiter, the daughter, so please you, of a dirty *takhaar bijwohner* on his own farm. He went mad about the girl, and thought her quite different from all other girls, though she had a troop of untidy sisters like herself galloping wild about the place. I will own she was a well-grown slip of a lass, tall and straight, and all that ; but she had a winding, bending way with her that struck me like something shameless. For the rest, she had a lot of coal-black hair that bunched round her face like the frame round a picture ; but there was something in the color of her skin and the shaping of her lips and nostrils, that made me say to myself, ‘ Ah, somewhere and somewhen your people have been meddling with the Kafirs.’

“ Black ? No, of course she wasn’t black.

LIKE UNTO LIKE

Nor yet yellow ; but I tell you, the black blood showed through her white skin so clearly that I wonder Stoffel Mostert did not see it and drive her from his door with a sjambok.

“ But the man was clean mad, and, spite of all we could do,—spite of his uncle, the Predikant ; spite of the ugly dirty family of the girl herself,—he rode her to the dorp and married her there ; for the Predikant, godly man, would not turn a hand in the business.

“ Now, just how they lived together I cannot tell you for sure ; for you may be very certain I drank no coffee in the house of the *bijwohner's* daughter. But, by all hearings, they bore with one another very well ; and I have even been told that Stoffel was much given to caressing the woman, and she would make out to love him very much indeed.

“ Perhaps she really did ? What nonsense ! How can a *bijwohner's* baggage love a well-to-do Burgher ? You are talking foolishness. But anyhow, if there was any trouble between them, they kept it to themselves for close upon a year.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"Then (this is how it has been told to me) one night Stoffel woke up in the dark, and his wife was not beside him.

"'Is it morning already?' he said, and looked through the window. But the stars were high and bright, and he saw it was scarcely midnight.

"He lay for a while, and then got up and drew on his clothes—doing everything slowly, hoping she would return. But when he was done she was not yet come, and he went out in the dark to the kitchen, and there he found the outer door unlocked and heard the dog whining in the yard.

"He took his gun from the beam where it hung and went forth. The dog barked and sprang to him, and together they went out to the veld, seeking Katrina Ruiter.

"The dog seemed to know what was wanted, and led Stoffel straight out towards the Kafir stad by the Blesbok Spruit. They did not go fast, and on the way Stoffel knelt down and prayed to God, and drew the cartridges from the gun. Then they went on.

LIKE UNTO LIKE

“When they got to the spruit they could see there was a big fire in the stad and hear the Kafirs crying out and beating the drums. The dog ran straight to the edge of the water, and then turned and whined, for there was no more scent. But Stoffel walked straight in, over his knees and up to his waist, and climbed the bank to the wall of the stad.

“Inside the Kafirs were dancing. Some were tricked out with ornaments and skins and feathers; some were mother-naked and painted all over their bodies. And there was one, a gaunt figure of horror, with his face streaked to the likeness of a skull, and bones hanging clattering all about him. They capered and danced round the fire like devils in hell, and behind them the men with the drums kept up their noise and seemed to drive the dancers to madness.

“And suddenly the figures round the fire gave way, save the one with the painted face and the bones; for from the shadow of a hut at the back of the fire came another, who rushed into the light and swayed wildly to the bar-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

barous music. The newcomer was naked as a babe new born ; wild as a beast of the field ; lithe as a serpent ; and crazy to savageness with the fire and the drums.

“Madly she danced, bending forwards and backwards, casting her bare arms above her, while the horror who danced with her writhed and screamed like a soul in pain.

“Stoffel, behind the wall, stood stunned and bound—for here he saw his wife. He thought nothing, said nothing ; but without an effort his hand ran a cartridge into the gun, and levelled it across the wall. He fired, and the lissom body dropped limp across the fire.”

Frikkie Viljoen rose in great wrath.

“This is how you talk of my sweetheart, is it ?” he cried. “Well, I will hear no more of your lies.” And he forthwith walked out of the house.

“Look at that !” said the Vrouw Grobelaar. “I never said a word about his sweetheart.”

COUNTING THE COLORS

THE horizon to the west was keen as the blade of a knife, and over it all the colors swam and blended in an ecstasy of sunset.

"There is more blood than peace in a sky like that," observed the Vrouw Grobelaar from her armchair on the stoop. "When I was a child, I never saw a mess of fire in the west but I thought it betokened the end of the world. Ah, well, one grows wiser!"

"Green is for love," said Katje. "Do you see any green in the sunset?" I saw a mile of it, edging on a sea of orange and a mountain of azure.

"Where?" demanded the old lady. "Oh, that—that's almost blue, which means sin in marriage. But naming the colors in the sky is a wasteful foolishness, and the folk that are guided by them always tumble in the end. When Jan Uys was on his death-bed, he said

TALES FROM THE VELDT

Dia had always been counting the colors with the Irishman, and that's what caused all the trouble."

Katje sighed.

"He was a man of sixty," the unconscious Vrouw continued, "and a Boer of the best, with a farm below the Hangklip, where my cousin Barend's aunt is now. He was a rich and righteous man, too, and as upstanding and strong as any man of his age that I ever saw. He had buried four good wives, so nobody can say he wasn't a good husband, but he had a way with him—something heavy and ugly, like a beast or a Kafir—which many girls didn't like. His fifth wife was Dia, who came from Lord knows where, somewhere down south, and she was only sixteen.

"I believe in fitting a girl with a husband when she is ripe, and sixteen is old enough with any well-grown maid. But in the case of Dia, it is a pity somebody did not stop to think. She was more than half a child; just a slender, laughing, running thing that liked sweets and peaches better than coffee and meat, and used

COUNTING THE COLORS

to throw stones. She threw one at my cart, with her arm low like a boy, and hit my Kafir on the neck, and then squeaked and ran to hide among the kraals. Yes, somebody should have stopped to think before they coupled her to big Jan Uys, with his scowl and his red eyes and white beard, and his sixty hard years behind him."

"I should think so, indeed," was Katje's comment.

"What you think is of no importance," retorted the old lady sharply. "I think so, and that settles it. Well, it did not take long for Dia to lose all the froth and foolishness that were in her. The child that was more than half of her nature was simply trampled to death, for Jan Uys had a short way of shaping his women-folk. She used to cry, they say, but never dared to rebel, which I can understand, knowing the man and the way he had of giving an order as though it were impossible for any one to disobey him. In particular, she could not learn to make cheese, and spoilt enough milk to feed a dorp on.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘Very well,’ he said, ‘if you cannot make the cheese the Kafir woman shall do it. And you shall do her work at the churn-handle. I want no idlers in my house.’

“And there he had her at the churn, grinding like a Kafir, for three days in every week, a white woman and his wife. Once she came to him and held out her hands.

“‘Look,’ she said. That was all: ‘look!’

“Her fingers and her palms were flayed and raw and oozed blood, but he simply glanced at them.

“‘You should have learned to work before,’ was all his answer. ‘Every one pays for learning, and you pay late. Go back to the churn.’

“The next thing, of course, was that she was missing, but Jan Uys was not troubled. He mounted his horse and rode out along the Drifts Road, going quietly, with his pipe alight. It was the road by which he had brought her from her home, and he knew the girl would try to go to her mother. In a few miles he picked up her spoor, and found some of the sole of one of her shoes. A mimosa carried a shred

COUNTING THE COLORS

of her dress, and in another place she had sat down. As he went farther, he found she had sat down in many places.

“‘Good,’ he said. ‘She is tired, and soon I shall catch her.’

“He came up with her twenty miles along the road, sitting down again. Her hair was all about her shoulders, and her face was white, with the great eyes burning in it like those of a woman in a fever.

“‘You are ready to come back?’ he asked, sitting on his horse, smoking and scowling down on her.

“‘What are you going to do with me?’ she asked in a trembling voice.

“He laughed that short ugly laugh of his. ‘You are a child,’ he answered. ‘I shall whip you.’

“Then she commenced to plead with him to let her go, to return without her, to spare her, to kill her. In the middle of it he leaned from the saddle, and caught hold of her arms and lifted her before him.

“‘All this may stop,’ he said, turning the

TALES FROM THE VELDT

horse. 'You have brought disgrace on me; you shall be punished.' And he carried her back.

"He did whip her—not brutally or terribly, I believe, as a man might do from wounded pride and revenge, but as a child is whipped, to warn it against future foolishness. And from the time of that beating the course of their life changed. She was no longer a child, but a very grave and silent woman, not prayerful at all, as might have been hoped, but just still and solemn. Dreadful, I call it. Then the young man Moore entered their lives.

"Jan Uys was making a dam right below the Hangklip. You know the dam: half of it is cut from the rock, and the water all comes into it from the end. It was not a matter of half a dozen Kafirs with spades, like most dams, but a business for dynamite and all kinds of ticklish and awkward work. So Jan wisely did not put his own fingers to it, but sent to the Rand for an Uitlander to come out and burst the rocks; and they sent him this young fellow, the Irishman Moore. He was a tall youth, with hair

COUNTING THE COLORS

like some of the red in that sunset over yonder, and a most astonishing way of making you laugh only by talking about ordinary things. And when he joked anybody would laugh, even the Predikant, who was always preaching about the crackling of thorns under a pot. With him, in a black box like a little coffin, he had a machine he called a banjo, upon which he would play lewd and idolatrous music which was most pleasing to the ear ; and he would sing songs while he played, which all ended with a yell. He was good at bursting the rocks, too. He would load holes full of dynamite in three or four places at once, and fetch tons of stone and earth out with each explosion. Jan Uys was pleased with him, for the young man cared nothing at all for his savage looks and ugly ways, and called him the Old Obadiah, who was a writer of the Bible.

“ ‘My wife,’ he told him, ‘is a young woman, and sad. You must talk to her in the evenings and make her laugh.’

“The Irishman looked at him with a strange face. ‘The poor creature needs a laugh,’ he said.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"So he used to talk to her on the stoop in the evenings, while Jan sat within at his Bible, and heard the murmur of their talk without. More than once, too, he heard a sound that was no longer familiar to him—the sound of Dia's pleasant childish laughter, and he scowled at his book and told himself he was satisfied. I think, perhaps, he had sometimes seen himself as he was, an old hard man crushing the soul of a child. Vaguely, perhaps, and unwillingly, but still he saw it sometimes.

"This went on. The Irishman blew up his dynamite and talked with Dia and played with her. Jan, watching, saw the color had returned to her cheeks and the life to her eyes. He came into the kitchen once and she was singing. She stopped suddenly.

"‘Why do you not go on?’ he asked, with his little red eyes staring at her.

"She had nothing to say, and he went away, to go down to the dam. The Irishman was sitting on an ant-heap away in the sun, and Jan passed him without speaking, and walked down to the place of explosions. He was looking at

COUNTING THE COLORS

the marks of fire on the rocks, when it seemed to him he heard a shout, and he saw, as he turned his head, that the Irishman was standing up. But he made no beck, and Jan walked along. When he looked again the young man had both hands to his head. Jan shaded his eyes to watch him.

“ Moore walked a few paces to and fro, stood still, and then, with a start, commenced to run furiously down to where Jan was standing. He ran with long strides and very fast, and was soon beside the old man, and seized him by the arm.

“ ‘ Out of this ! ’ he cried. ‘ Out of this ! The holes are loaded, and ye’ve sixty seconds to save yer life.’

“ Jan stood still. ‘ Why did you not tell me before ? ’ he asked ; but the other did not answer, but only dragged at his arm.

“ Jan shook his hand off. ‘ I have a mind to stay,’ he said in a calm voice. ‘ If Dia is made a widow, you will know how to look after her.’

“ ‘ And that’s true ! ’ cried the Irishman. ‘ But you shan’t make a murderer of me.’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“And he drew back his fist and knocked the old man down. Catching him by the collar, he dragged him to the shelter of a big boulder, flung him close to it, and lay down on top of his body. In the next moment the blast went off, and the gust of fire and rocks and earth roared and whistled through the air above them. The sound struck them like a bludgeon, and they lay for a while, stunned and deafened, while pieces of stone slid and tinkled on the boulder that had sheltered them. At last they rose.

“‘I made a mistake and I am glad,’ said Jan. ‘Will you shake hands with me?’

“‘I will not,’ was the answer.

“‘So be it. But there can be no need to tell Dia of this.’

“The Irishman nodded, and that afternoon, again, he and Dia were in the garden, throwing stones at a sardine-tin on a stick to see who could hit it first. Dia knocked it down easily, and Jan, sitting indoors with his coat off, heard them laughing.

“At supper that night he looked up to Dia. ‘This coffee has a sour taste,’ he said.

COUNTING THE COLORS

“‘Mine hasn’t,’ said the Irishman.

“‘Try mine, then,’ said Jan, and passed Dia his cup to hand to him. She fumbled in taking it and dropped it on the floor. The new cup that she poured out for him had no sour taste.

“For several days after that there was a sour taste in many things that he ate and drank, and he complained of it each time.

“‘You must be getting ill,’ Dia said.

“‘It is possible,’ he answered, watching her. ‘I have felt very strange of late days.’

“He saw the color leave her cheeks, and a light come into her eyes.

“‘What can it be?’ he said. ‘Should I have a doctor, do you think?’

“‘I am afraid of doctors,’ she answered. ‘Let me give you some of my herb medicine.’

“He drank what she brought him and put the cup down.

“‘I was hard to you once, Dia,’ he said. ‘I have been sorry since.’

“That night he sent a mounted Kafir for his brother, and when, at noon next day, that brother came, Dia and her Irishman were

TALES FROM THE VELDT

already gone. But Jan would not have them hunted.

"‘I whipped her once,’ he said, ‘and I am paid for it.’

"His brother, a great simple soul, was dumb-founded.

"‘Do you mean that she has poisoned you?’ he demanded.

"The dying man shook his head.

"‘They used to count the colors,’ he said. ‘There was much of love in the colors, but there was nothing of me. Let them go!’

"And so," concluded the Vrouw Grobelaar impressively, "he died, and it all came of counting the colors in the sunset, which is a warning to you, Katje ——"

"To count colors," interrupted that maiden hotly. "I think the old wretch got just what he deserved."

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

THE old yellow-fanged dog-baboon that was chained to a post in the yard had a dangerous trick of throwing stones. He would seize a piece of rock in two hands, stand erect and whirl round on his heels till momentum was obtained, and then—let go. The missile would fly like a bullet, and woe betide any one who stood in its way. The performance precluded any kind of aim ; the stone was hurled off at any chance tangent : and it was bad luck rather than any kind of malice that guided one three-pound boulder through the window, across the kitchen, and into a portrait of Judas de Beer which hung on the wall not half a dozen feet from the slumbering Vrouw Grobelaar.

She bounced from her chair and ballooned to the door with a silent swift agility most surprising to see in a lady of her generous build, and not a sound did she utter. She was of good veld-bred fighting stock, which never

TALES FROM THE VELDT

cried out till it was hurt, and there was even something of compassion in her face as Frikkie jumped from the stoop with a twelve-foot thong in his hand. It was, after all, the baboon that suffered most, if his yells were any index to his feelings. Frikkie could smudge a fly ten feet off with just a flick of his whip, and all the tender parts of the accomplished animal came in for ruthless attention.

"He ought to be shot," was Frikkie's remark as he curled up the thong at the end of the discipline. "A baboon is past teaching if he has bad habits. He is more like a man than a beast."

The Vrouw Grobelaar seated herself in the stoop chair which by common consent was reserved for her use, and shook her head.

"Baboons are uncanny things," she answered slowly. "When you shoot them, you can never be quite sure how much murder there is in it. The old story is that some of them have souls and some not: and it is quite certain that they can talk when they will. You have heard them crying in the night sometimes. Well, you ask

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

a Kafir what that means. Ask an old wise Kafir, not a young one that has forgotten the wisdom of the black people and learned the foolishness only of the white."

"What does it mean, tante?" It was I that put the question. Katje, too, seemed curious.

The old lady eyed me gloomily.

"If you were a landed Boer, instead of a kind of schoolmaster," she replied, witheringly, "you would not need to ask such a question. But I will tell you. A baboon may be wicked—look at that one showing his teeth and cursing—but he is not blind nor a fool. He runs about on the hills, and steals and fights and scratches, and all the time he has all the knowledge and twice the strength of a man, if it were not for the tail behind him and the hair on his body. So it is natural that sometimes he should be grieved to be such a mean thing as a baboon when he could be a useful kind of man if the men would let him. And at nights, particularly, when their troop is in laager and the young ones are on watch among the high rocks, it comes home to the best of them, and they

TALES FROM THE VELDT

sob and weep like young widows, pretending that they have pains inside so that the others shall not feel offended and turn on them. Any one may hear them in the kloofs on a windless night, and, I can tell you, the sound of their sorrow is pitiful."

Katje threw out a suggestion to console them with buckshot, and the Vrouw Grobelaar nodded with meaning.

"To hate baboons is well enough in the wife of a Burgher," she said sweetly. "I am glad to see there is so much fitness and wifeliness about you, since you will naturally spend all your life on farms."

Katje's flush was a distress signal. First blood to the Vrouw.

"Baboons," continued the old lady, "are among a farmer's worst enemies. They steal and destroy and menace all the year round, but for all that there are many farmers who will not shoot or trap them. And these, you will notice, are always farmers of a ripe age and sense-shaped by experience. *They* know, you may be sure. My stepsister's first husband, Shad-

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

rach van Guelder, shot at baboons once, and was so frightened afterwards that he was afraid to be alone in the dark."

There was a story toward, and no one moved.

"There were many Kafirs on his farm, which you have not seen," pursued the Vrouw Grobelaar, adjusting her voice to narrative pitch. "It was on the fringe of the Drakensberg, and many spurs of hill, divided by deep kloofs like gashes, descended on to it. So plenty of water came down, and the cattle were held from straying by the rocks, on one side at any rate. The Kafirs had their kraals dotted all about the land; and as they were of the kind that works, my stepsister's husband suffered them to remain and grow their little patches of mealies, while they worked for him in between. He was, of course, a cattle Boer, as all of our family have always been, but here were so many Kafirs to be had for nothing, that he soon commenced to plough great spaces of land and sow valuable crops. There was every prospect that he would make very much money out of that

TALES FROM THE VELDT

farm ; for corn always sells, even when cattle are going for only seven pounds apiece, and Shadrach van Guelder was very cheerful about it.

“ But when a farmer weighs an ungrown crop, you will always find that there is something or other he does not take into account. He tells off the weather and the land and the Kafirs and the water on his fingers, and forgets to bend down his thumb to represent God—or something. Shadrach van Guelder lifted up his eyes to the hills from whence came the water, but it was not until the green corn was six inches high that he saw that there came with it baboons. Armies and republics of them ; more baboons than he had thought to exist,—they swooped down on his sprouting lands and rioted, ate and rooted, trampled and wantoned, with that kind of bouncing devilishness that not even a Kafir can correctly imitate. In one night they undid all his work on five sown morgen of fat land, and with the first wink of the sun in the east they were back again in their kopjes, leaving devastation and foulness wherever they passed.

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

"It was my stepsister's husband that stood on one leg and cursed like a Jew. He was wrathful as a Hollander that has been drinking water, and what did not help to make him content was the fact that hardly anything would avail to protect his lands. Once the baboons had tasted the sweetness of the young corn, they would come again and again, camping in the kloofs overhead as long as anything remained for them, like a deaf guest. But for all that, he had no notion of leaving them to plunder at their ease. The least one can do with an unwelcome visitor is to make him uncomfortable; and he sent to certain kraals on the farm for two old Kafirs he had remarked who had the appearance of cunning old men.

"They came and squatted before him, squirming and shuffling, as Kafirs do when a white man talks to them. One was quite a common kind of Kafir, gone a little gray with age, a tuft of white wool on his chin, and little patches of it here and there on his head. But the other was a small twisted yellow man, with no hair at all, and eyes like little blots of fire on

TALES FROM THE VELDT

a charred stick ; and his arms were so long and gnarled and lean that he had a bestial look, like a laborious animal.

“‘The baboons have killed the crop on the lower lands,’ said Shadrach, smacking his leg with his sjambok. ‘If they are not checked, they will destroy all the corn on this farm. What is the way to go about it?’

“‘The little yellow man was biting his lips and turning a straw in his hands, and gave no answer, but the other spoke.

“‘I am from Shangaanland,’ he said, ‘and there, when the baboons plague us, we have a way with them, a good way.’

“‘He sneered sideways at his yellow companion as he spoke, and the look which the latter returned to him was a thing to shrink from.

“‘What is this way?’ demanded Shadrach.

“‘You must trap a baboon,’ explained the old Kafir. ‘A leading baboon, for choice, who has a lot to say in the government of the troop. And then you must skin him, and let him go again. The others will travel miles and miles

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

as soon as they see him, and never come back again.'

" 'It makes me sick to think of it,' said Shadrach. 'Surely you know some other way of scaring them?'

"The old Kafir shook his head slowly, but the yellow man ceased to smile and play with the straw and spoke.

" 'I do not believe in that way, baas. A Shangaan baboon'—he grinned at his companion—'is more easily frightened than those of the Drakensberg. I am of the bushmen, and I know. If you flay one of those up yonder, the others will make war, and where one came before, ten will come every night. A baboon is not a fat lazy Kafir; one must be careful with him.'

" 'How would you drive them away, then?' asked Shadrach.

"The yellow man shuffled his hands in the dust, squatting on his heels. There! There! See, the baboon in the yard is doing the very same thing.

" 'If I were the baas,' said the yellow man, 'I

TALES FROM THE VELDT

would turn out the young men to walk round the fields at night, with buckets to hit with sticks, and make a noise. And I—well, I am of the bushmen——’ he scratched himself and smiled emptyily.

“‘Yes, yes?’ demanded Shadrach. He knew the wonderful ways of the bushmen with some animals.

“‘I do not know if anything can be done,’ said the yellow man, ‘but if the baas is willing I can go up to the rocks and try.’

“‘How?’

“But he could tell nothing. None of these wizards that have charms to subdue the beasts can tell you anything about it. A Hottentot will smell the air and say what cattle are near, but if you bid him tell you how he does it, he giggles like a fool and is ashamed.

“‘I do not know if anything can be done,’ the yellow man repeated. ‘I cannot promise the baas, but I can try.’

“‘Well, try then,’ ordered Shadrach, and went away to make the necessary arrangements to have the young Kafirs in the fields that night.

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

“They did as he bade, and the noise was loathsome,—enough to frighten anything with an ear in its head. The Kafirs did not relish the watch in the dark at first, but when they found that their work was only to thump buckets and howl, they came to do it with zest, and roared and banged till you would have thought a judgment must descend on them. The baboons heard it, sure enough, and came down after a while to see what was going on. They sat on their rumps outside the circle of Kafirs, as quiet as people in a church, and watched the niggers drumming and capering as though it were a show for their amusement. Then they went back, leaving the crops untouched, but pulling all the huts in one kraal to pieces as they passed. It was the kraal of the old white-tufted Shangaan, as Shadrach learned afterwards.

“Shadrach was pleased that the row had saved his corn, and next day he gave the twisted yellow man a lump of tobacco. The man tucked it into his cheek and smiled, wrinkling his nose and looking at the ground.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘Did you get speech of the baboons last night among the rocks?’ Shadrach asked.

“The other shook his head, grinning. ‘I am old,’ he said. ‘They pay no attention to me, but I will try again. Perhaps, before long, they will listen.’

“‘When they do that,’ said Shadrach, ‘you shall have five pounds of tobacco and five bottles of dop.’

“The man was squatting on his heels all this time at Shadrach’s feet, and his hard fingers, like claws, were picking at the ground. Now he put out a hand, and began fingering the laces of the farmer’s shoes with a quick fluttering movement that Shadrach saw with a spasm of terror. It was so exactly the trick of a baboon, so entirely a thing animal and unhuman.

“‘You are more than half a baboon yourself,’ he said. ‘Let go of my leg! Let go, I say! Curse you, get away—get away from me!’

“The creature had caught his ankle with both hands, the fingers, hard and shovel-ended, pressing into his flesh.

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

“‘Let go!’ he cried, and struck at the man with his sjambok.

“The man bounded on all-fours to evade the blow, but it took him in the flank, and he was human—or Kafir—again in a moment, and rubbed himself and whimpered quite naturally.

“‘Let me see no more of your baboon tricks,’ stormed Shadrach, the more angry because he had been frightened. ‘Keep them for your friends among the rocks. And now be off to your kraal.’

“That night again the Kafirs drummed all about the green corn, and sang in chorus the song which the mountain-Kafirs sing when the new moon shows like a paring from a finger-nail of gold. It is a long and very loud song, with stamping of feet every minute, and again the baboons came down to see and listen. The Kafirs saw them, many hundreds of humped black shapes, and sang the louder, while the crowd of beasts grew ever denser as fresh parties came down and joined it. It was opposite the rocks on which they sat that the singing-men collected, roaring their long verses and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

clattering on the buckets, doubtless not without some intention to jeer at and flout the baffled baboons, who watched them in such a silence. It was drooping now to the pit of night, and things were barely seen as shapes, when from higher up the line, where the guardians of the crops were sparser, there came a discord of shrieks.

“‘The baboons are through the line,’ they cried, and it was on that instant that the great watching army of apes came leaping in a charge on the main force of the Kafirs. Oh, but that was a wild, a haunting thing! Great bull-headed dog-baboons, with naked fangs and clutching hands alert for murder; bounding mothers of squealing litters that led their young in a dash to the fight; terrible lean old bitches that made for the men when others went for the corn,—they swooped like a flood of horror on the aghast Kafirs, biting, tearing, bounding through the air like uncouth birds, and in one second the throng of the Kafirs melted before them, and they were among the corn.

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

“Eight men they killed by rending, and of the others, some sixty, there was not one but had his wound—some bite to the bone, some gash, where iron fingers had clutched and torn their way through skin and flesh. When they came to Shadrach, and woke him wearily with the breathless timidity of beaten men, it was already too late to go with a gun to the corn-lands. The baboons had contented themselves with small plunder after their victory, and withdrew orderly to the hills; and even as Shadrach came to the door of the homestead, he saw the last of their marshalled line, black against the sky, moving swiftly towards the kloofs.

“He flung out his hands like a man in despair, with never a word to ease his heart, and then the old Shangaan Kafir stood up before him. He had the upper part of his right arm bitten to the bone and worried, and now he cast back the blanket from his shoulder and held out the quivering wound to his master.

“‘It was the chief of the baboons that gave me this,’ he said, ‘and he is a baboon only in the night. He came through the ranks of them

TALES FROM THE VELDT

bounding like a boulder on a steep hillside, and it was for me that his teeth were bared. So when he hung by his teeth to my arm and tore and snarled, I drew my nails across his back, that the baas should know the truth.'

" 'What is this madness?' cried Shadrach.

" 'No madness, but simple devilry,' answered the Shangaan, and there came a murmur of support from the Kafirs about him. 'The leader of the baboons is Naqua, and it was he who taught them the trick they played us to-night.'

" 'Naqua?' repeated Shadrach, feeling cold and weak.

" 'The bushman,' explained the old man. 'The yellow man with the long lean arms who gave false counsel to the baas.'

" 'It is true,' came the chorus of the Kafirs. 'It is true; we saw it.'

" Shadrach pulled himself together and raised a hand to the lintel of the door to steady himself.

" 'Fetch me Naqua!' he ordered, and a pair of them went upon that errand. But they came

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

back empty: Naqua was not at his hut, and none had news of him.

"Shadrach dismissed the Kafirs to patch their wounds, and at sun-up he went down to the lands where the eight dead Kafirs still lay among the corn, to see what traces remained of the night's work. He had hoped to find a clue in the tracks, but the feet of the Kafirs and the baboons were so mingled that the ground was dumb, and on the grass of the baboons' return there remained, of course, no sign. He was no fool, my stepsister's first husband, and since a wild and belly-quaking tale was the only one that offered, he was not ready to cast it aside till a better one were found. At any rate it was against Naqua that his preparations were directed.

"He had seven guns in his house for which ammunition could be found, and from among all the Kafirs on the land he chose a half-dozen Zulus, who, as you know, will always rather fight than eat. These were only too ready to face the baboons again, since they were to have guns in their hands; and a kind of ambush

TALES FROM THE VELDT

was devised. They were to lie among the corn so as to command the flank of the beasts, and Shadrach was to lie in the middle of them, and would give the signal when to commence firing by a shot from his own rifle. There was built, too, a pile of brushwood lying on straw soaked in oil, and this one of them was to put a light to as soon as the shooting began.

“It was dark when they took their places, and then commenced a long and anxious watch among the corn, when every bush that creaked was an alarm and every small beast of the veld that squealed set hearts to thumping. From where he lay on his stomach, with his rifle before him, Shadrach could see the line of ridge of rocks over which the baboons must come, dark against a sky only just less dark; and with his eyes fixed on this he waited. Afterwards he said that it was not the baboons he waited for, but the yellow man, Naqua, and he had in his head an idea that all the evil and pain that ever was, and all the sin to be, had a home in that bushman. So a man hates an enemy.

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

“They came at last. Five of them were suddenly seen on the top of the rocks, standing erect and peering round for a trap ; but Shadrach and his men lay very still, and soon one of these scouts gave a call, and then was heard the pat ! pat ! of hard feet as the body of them came up. There was not light enough to tell one from another, except by size, and as they trooped down among the corn Shadrach lay with his finger throbbing on his trigger, peering among them. But he could see nothing except the mass of their bodies, and waiting till the main part of them was past him, so that he could have a shot at them as they came back, should it happen that they retired at once, he thrust forward his rifle, aimed into the brown, and fired.

“Almost in the same instant the rifles of the Zulus spoke, and a crackle of shots ran up and down their line. Then there was a flare of light as the bonfire was lit, and they could see the army of baboons in a fuss of panic dashing to and fro. They fired again and again into the tangle of them, and the beasts commenced

TALES FROM THE VELDT

to scatter and flee, and Shadrach and his men rose to their full height and shot faster, and the hairy army vanished into the darkness, defeated.

"There was a guffaw of laughter from the Zulus, but ere it was finished a shout from Shadrach brought their rifles leaping up again. The baboons were coming back,—a line of them was breaking from the darkness beyond the range of the fire, racing in great leaps towards the men. As they came into the light they were a sight to terrify a host, all big tusk-ers, and charging without a sound. Shadrach, aiming by instinct only, dropped two as they came, and the next instant they were upon him. He heard the grunt of the Zulu next him as a huge beast leaped against his chest and bore him down, and there were screams from another. Then something heavy and swift drove at him like a bullet and he clubbed his rifle. As the beast flew, with hands and feet drawn in for the grapple, he hewed at it with the butt and smashed it to the ground. The stock struck on bone, and he felt it crush and fail, and there was the thing at his feet.

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

"How they broke the charge, with what a frenzy of battle they drove the baboons from them, none of the four who spoke again could ever tell. But it must have been very soon after Shadrach clubbed his rifle that the beasts wavered, were beaten, and fled screaming, and the farmer found himself leaning on his weapon and a great Zulu, shining with sweat, talking to him.

"‘Never have I had such a fight,’ the Zulu was saying, ‘and never may I hope for such another. The baas is a great chief. I watched him.’

"Something was picking at Shadrach’s boots, and he drew back with a shudder from the form that lay at his feet.

"‘Bring a stick from the fire,’ he ordered. ‘I want to see this—this baboon.’

"As the man went, he ran a cartridge into the breach of his rifle, and when the burning stick was brought, he turned over the body with his foot.

"A yellow face mowed up at him, and pale yellow eyes sparkled dully.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘Tck!’ clicked the Zulu in surprise. ‘It is the bushman, Naqua. No, baas,’ as Shadrach cocked his rifle, ‘do not shoot him. Keep him and chain him to a post. He will like that less.’

“‘I shoot,’ answered Shadrach, and shattered the evil grin that gleamed in the face on the ground with a quick shot.

“And, as I told you, my stepsister’s first husband, Shadrach van Guelder, was afraid to be alone in the dark after that night,” concluded the Vrouw Grobelaar. “It is ill shooting baboons, Frikkie.”

“I’m not afraid,” retorted Frikkie, and the baboon in the yard rattled his chain and cursed shrilly.

MORDER DRIFT

THE business was something before my time, but I can remember several versions of it, which were commonly current when I first came into the Dopfontein district. It was not much of a tale as a general thing, except that, if you happened to have a strain of hot blood in you, it discovered a quality of very picturesque pathos. However, as you shall see, only the tail end of the story was generally known, and it was the Vrouw Grobelaar, the transmitter of chronicles, who divulged it to Katje and myself one evening in its proper proportions.

As I first heard it the tale was about thus. The drift across the Dolf Spruit, below the Zwaartkop, was a ragged gash in the earth, hidden from all approaches by dense bushes of *wacht een beetje* thorn. The spruit was here throttled between banks of worn stone, and the water roared over the drift at a depth that made

TALES FROM THE VELDT

it impassible to foot-farers. Its name, Morder Drift (Murder Ford), was secured to it no less by its savage aspect than by the incident associated with it.

One morning a Kafir brought news to a farm of a strange thing at the drift, a tale of violent death at criminal hands. Straightway four men got to horse and rode over. Arriving, they found their information justified in a strange fashion. Seated in the deep southern approach to the water was a Boer woman, a young one, pillowing on her lap the head of a murdered man, whose body oozed blood from a dozen wounds. The woman paid no heed to the approach of the Burghers, and they, on nearing the body, observed that her eyes were fixed across the spruit, and that a smile, a dreadful twisted smile of contempt, ruled her face as though frozen there.

The woman was recognized as a girl of good Boer family who had recently married in opposition to the strong objections of her family; the dead man at her feet was soon identified as all that was left of her husband.

That was the tale: it ended there like a broken string, for while the matter was under investigation at the hands of the feldkornet, a Kafir chief in the Magaliesberg commenced to assert himself, and the commando of the district was called out to wait on him. And there the matter dropped, for during the two years that elapsed before she died the woman never uttered a word. But (and here, for me, at any rate, the wonder of the story commenced) every day and all day, come fine or rain, sun or storm, there she would sit in the drift, damning the traitor's road of escape with that smile the Burghers had shuddered at. The scene, and the unspeakable sadness of it, used to govern my dreams.

I was telling Katje the story, for she said she had never heard it, but this I since learned to have been untrue. At first the conversation had been varied even to the point of inanity, but in time it turned—as such conversations will, you know—to the wonder and beauty of the character of women in general. I think it must have been at this stage that the Vrouw

TALES FROM THE VELDT

Grobelaar, who had been dozing like a dog, with one ear awake, commenced to listen ; and I have always thought the better of the good lady for not annihilating the situation with some ponderously arch comment, as was a habit of hers.

When my tale was finished, though, the contempt of the artist for the mere artisan moved her to complete the record.

"You are wrong when you say the truth never came to light," she said. "I know the whole story."

"But," I answered in surprise, "nothing was ever done in the matter."

"Certainly not," she said with spirit. "It was not a Kafir murder. It was a killing by Burghers, and, though God knows I utterly condemn all such doings, it cannot be denied that there was as much on the one side as on the other."

The due request was proffered.

"It is not a tale to carry abroad," observed the old lady. "It concerns some of my family. The woman was Christina van der Poel, a

MORDER DRIFT

halfsister of my second husband, and what I am now telling you is the confession of Koos van der Poel, her brother, on the day he died. I remember he was troubled with an idea that he would be buried near her, and that she would cry out on him from her grave to his."

The suggestion, as you must agree, quite justified Katje's moving closer to me.

"It was like this," resumed the Vrouw Grobe-laar, after an expressionless glance at the two of us. "Christina was a wild fanciful girl, with an eye to every stranger that off-saddled at the farm, Katje; and she had barely a civil word to waste on a bashful Burgher. I can't say I ever saw much in her myself. She was a tall young woman, with a face that drew the eye, as it were; but she was restless and unquiet in her motions, and, to my mind, too thin and leggy. But men have no taste in these things; and if Christina had been of a decent turn, she might have had her pick of all the unmarried men within a day's ride, and there used to be some very good men about here.

"But, as I said, she kept them all on the far

TALES FROM THE VELDT

side of the fence, and for a long time their only comfort was in seeing no one else take her. Till one day a surprising thing happened.

"A tall smart man rode into the farm one afternoon and hung up his horse on the rail. He swaggered with his great clumping feet right into the house, and went from one room to another till he found the old father.

" 'Are you Mynheer van der Poel?' he asked him in a loud voice, standing in the middle of the chamber with his hat on his head and his sjambok in his hand.

" 'I am,' answered the other.

" 'I am John Dunn,' said the stranger. 'I have a store at Bothaskraal, and I am come to ask for your daughter to wife.'

" 'An Englishman?' asked the old man.

" 'To be sure,' said the stranger.

" 'But where have you seen the girl?' asked Mynheer van der Poel.

" 'Oh, in many places,' replied the Englishman, laughing. 'We are very good friends, she and I, and have been meeting every evening for a long time. Indeed, you have to thank me

MORDER DRIFT

for giving you a chance to consent to the wedding.'

"Now the Heer van der Poel was always a quiet man, but there was nothing weak in him.

" 'I do thank you,' he said, 'for playing the part of an honest man, and no doubt the girl has been foolish. A girl is, you know ; and you are big enough to have taken her eye. But there will be no marriage ; Christina is to marry a Boer.'

" 'So you object to an Englishman ?' sneered the other.

" 'Yes,' said the old man.

" 'What have you against the English ?'

" 'In general, nothing at all. I have found them brave men and good fighters ; at Potchefstroom I killed three. But,' and the old man held up his forefinger, 'I will not have one in my family.'

" 'I see,' said the other. 'So you refuse me your daughter ?'

" 'Yes,' answered the father.

" 'So be it,' returned the stranger, turning to the door. 'In that case I shall take her with-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

out your leave.' And off he went at a canter, never looking back.

"Next day Mynheer van der Poel took Christina into a kraal, and when she had confessed her meetings with the Englishman, he gave her a sound beating with a stirrup-leather, and told her that for the future she must not go alone outside of the house.

" 'And either I or one of your brothers will always be at home,' concluded the old man, 'so that if this Mynheer Dunn comes, he will be shot.'

"So Christina for upwards of a month never saw her Englishman. Of course the matter was a great scandal, and her people said as little as they could about it; but, nevertheless, it got about, and the number of visitors to the farm for the next week or two was astonishing. But call as often as they pleased, the Englishman stayed away and they saw nothing of him.

"But one morning when daylight came Christina was missing. They looked about, and there was no trace of her, but in the road outside there was the spoor of a cart that had halted in passing during the night.

MORDER DRIFT

“‘It is plain enough,’ said the old man ‘She is with her Englishman at Bothaskraal. Sons, get your rifles, and we will ride over.’

“But on the way they had to pass Morder Drift, and thinking only of the shame to their house, they rode altogether into the water, none looking ahead. There had been rains, and each man was compelled to give all his care to guiding his horse through the torrent, while holding his rifle aloft in one hand.

“When they were thus all in the water together they heard a shout, and the Englishman on a big horse rode down to the water’s edge. He had a gun at his shoulder covering them all, and they headed their horses up-stream and halted to hear him speak.

“He was prideful and contemptuous. ‘Six of you,’ he cried, ‘no less than six, who have come out to kill one man, and the whole lot bottled up in the middle of a ditch and waiting to be shot. The first one that moves his rifle till I give permission dies.’

“Not one of them answered, but all kept their eyes on him. Old Mynheer van der Poel had a

TALES FROM THE VELDT

cartridge in his rifle, and he touched his horse with the spur under water that it might fidget round towards the Englishman.

“‘Well,’ said the man on the bank, ‘if I shot each one of you as you sit, I should be in my right, and not one could blame me. But where I come from one does not shoot even a duck sitting, and I am going to let you go. You shall have a chance to do the thing decently, so come back and fight me openly. Or,’ and he laughed as he spoke, ‘you can do it another way. I am leaving this cursed country shortly with Christina. See if you can get at me and kill me before then. It’s a fair offer; but I warn you you’ll find it a dangerous game, and there’ll be blood-letting on the one side or the other.’

“He drew back his horse a little, still covering them with the rifle. ‘Now,’ he cried, ‘drop your guns into the water, and you can go. Drop them, I say!’

“One by one the young men let their rifles fall into the stream; but the old father fumbled with his finger. Suddenly there was a shot, and

MORDER DRIFT

the Englishman's big horse shied at the spurt of mud at his feet. Of course the old man could not shoot without aiming.

"Then the Englishman brought round his gun, and the old man, sitting on his horse, with the water streaming over his saddle, knew that a tremble of the finger would send him to God.

"'But that you are Christina's father,' said the Englishman, in a voice as clear as falling pebbles, 'I would put a bullet through your white head this minute. This time, though, you shall go alive, but by ——! you shall have your ducking.'

"And dropping his muzzle, he suddenly shot the straining horse through the head, so that it fell immediately, and the old man was plunged out of sight in the rushing water.

"When he got to the bank, fifty yards down the stream, the Englishman was gone.

"They went home soberly, all busy with thoughts of their own. When they neared the home kraals the father spoke.

"'This is a business to be wiped out,' he said. 'This shame cannot rest with us. For my part,

TALES FROM THE VELDT

I could not pray with a clear mind and that Englishman alive.'

"They all agreed with him, though, as Koos admitted, with the death-rattle shaking him, they were all dreadfully afraid of that big swaggering man. The old man had done a fair share of fighting before, and at Potchefstroom, as he said, he had killed three rooineks, so he was ready enough for the business.

"But the young men had only been out against the Kafirs, and there is not very much in that.

"Now old Mynheer van der Poel was not such a fool as to risk his life or the lives of his sons in fighting the Englishman. The war against the rooineks had made him *slim*; for it is chiefly by wits and knowledge that the Boers have beaten the English. So instead of going out to be shot like a fool, he made a plan.

"You know how Bothaskraal lies. At the back of it there is nothing but the Kafir country and the thorn bush; and if you would get to the dorp, or to the road, or to the railway, you must cross the Dolf Spruit, and for miles

MORDER DRIFT

the only crossing place is Morder Drift. So at Morder Drift they set a watch, four in the daytime and three in the night, never losing sight of the drift.

“In this manner they waited a month till the evil night came. It was a night sent by the devil’s own design, a gruesome, cloud-heavy, sulphurous night, and at the drift were the old man, Koos, and the lad Hendrik. Koos was on watch among the bushes; the other two crouched below the bank out of the wind. A little rain dribbled down, and of a sudden Koos whistled like a korhaan.

“The two got their rifles and went down into the water on foot, the old man up stream, the lad down, stepping carefully, for the stream was very strong and pulled at their waists dangerously. Koos walked into the road, above the water and in the shadow, and waited.

“Three horses came down the other side of the drift, and three persons on them. The one was the Englishman, the other was Christina, the third a Kafir. In the darkness of the drift they could not see the watchers, and in the

TALES FROM THE VELDT

swirl of the water they could not hear the click of the rifles.

"Into the water they rode, and then Koos, who had a magazine rifle, suddenly stood up and shot the Kafir. He screamed and fell into the water, and his horse turned and galloped off.

"'Keep still, Mynheer Dunn,' cried Koos. 'A movement and you are dead. Better raise your hands, I think. That is right. Now, Christina, ride out of the water on this side.'

"'Stay where you are, Christina,' said the Englishman. 'Sir,' he called to Koos, 'you have trapped me sure enough, and I ask and expect nothing. But what are you going to do to Christina?'

"'Are you Christina's husband?' asked Koos. 'Are you married to her?'

"'I am,' answered the other.

"'That is well for Christina. Otherwise she would be shot. We have little patience with wrong-doers, I can tell you.'

"'But what are you going to do with her?'

"'I? Nothing at all,' answered Koos. 'She

is no longer my business. It will be for Christina's father to decide what shall be done to her.'

"'Will you promise ——' began the Englishman ; but Koos laughed.

"'I promise nothing,' he replied. 'In a few moments you will be dead, and past bargaining. Christina, ride on.'

"'Stay a moment,' called the Englishman again. 'I will ask you a favor, anyhow. It is not well to refuse a dying man, and perhaps in a few moments I shall have more power over you. So I beg you, spare Christina.'

"'I promise nothing at all,' answered Koos. 'I am not afraid of ghosts.'

"'I wasn't thinking of that,' said the other. 'So I have nothing to gain whether by talking or holding my tongue?'

"'Nothing at all!'

"'Very well ; if that be the case, take that !' and very suddenly he snatched a pistol—one of those things which hold six bullets—from his pocket and shot Koos in the leg.

Christina screamed as her horse bounded and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

carried her forward out of the water. Koos did not fall, but caught it by the rein and dragged her from the saddle. He held her close, with his left arm about her and his rifle in his right hand, pistol-fashion.

“ ‘Shoot again, rooinek,’ he cried mockingly. ‘You will be sure to hit one of us.’ And then he fired.

“At the same moment Mynheer van der Poel, in the water up-stream, fired, and the Englishman fell on to the bow of his saddle. The horse dashed down the water, and Koos, gripping the screaming girl, heard young Hendrik shoot again.

“There was silence for a minute then, and Mynheer van der Poel climbed out of the water and called to Hendrik.

“ ‘Have you got him?’ he cried.

“ ‘Yes,’ answered the boy; ‘I am holding him up, but he is still alive.’

“ ‘Can he stand?’ cried the old man.

“ ‘No,’ came the answer from the water.

“ ‘Then drown him,’ commanded the father. ‘I will come down and help.’

MORDER DRIFT

"When he had climbed down into the water again Koos laid the girl down. She was still white ; her senses had fled. Presently as he was binding his leg he heard the father say —

" 'Now raise him a little, and I will shoot again to make sure' ; and immediately the sound of shot burst out. At this the girl opened her eyes, and Koos, looking at her, saw with astonishment that she smiled.

" 'Have you killed him, Koos ?' she asked very gently.

" 'Be quiet,' answered Koos.

" 'But tell me,' she persisted.

" 'Yes,' he replied at length.

"She closed her eyes and sighed. 'That was cruel,' she said ; 'I loved him so.'

"But she sat up again as the old father and the lad dragged the body out of the water.

" 'Four wounds,' panted the old man. 'Not one of us missed. That was very good, considering the darkness.' And as he flung the bleeding corpse down he turned upon Christina.

" 'Here,' he cried, calling her by a dreadful word of shame. 'Here is your husband.'

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘Father,’ said young Hendrik, ‘there is money in his pockets. If I take it people will say this was done by Kafirs.’

“‘Take it then,’ said the old man, and when the boy had emptied the pockets he bade him throw the money into the stream.

“Then they mounted and rode away, but not homewards. They rode across the stream to cross it twenty miles down, that their spoor should not betray them.

“And as Koos told me, while his eyes glazed, he turned and looked back, and there he saw Christina with the Englishman’s head on her lap, looking after them with a face that set him trembling.”

As the old lady concluded I passed an arm round Katje.

A GOOD END

ONE of the most awe-inspiring traits of the Vrouw Grobelaar was her familiarity with the subject of death. She had a discriminating taste in corpses, and remembered of several old friends only the figure they cut when the life was gone from them. She was as opinionative in this regard as in all others ; she had her likes and dislikes, and it is my firm belief to this day that she never rose to such heights of conversational greatness as when attending a death-bed. It is on record that more than one invalid was relieved of all desire to live after being prepared for dissolution by the Vrouw Grobelaar.

On the evening following the burial of Katrina Potgieter's baby, which died of drinking water after a surfeit of dried peaches, the old lady was in great feather. Never were her reminiscences so ghoulish and terrifying, and never did she hurl her weighty moralities over so wide a scope. Eventually she lapsed into criticism,

TALES FROM THE VELDT

and announced that the art of dying effectively was little practised nowadays.

"I hate to see a person slink out of life," she said. "Give me a man or a woman that knows all clearly to the last, and gives other people an opportunity to see some little way into eternity. After all, there's nothing more in dying than changing the style of one's clothes, and even the most paltry folk have some consideration as corpses. I can't see what there is to be afraid of."

"I don't think that," observed Katje. "Even if it wasn't that I was soon to be dead and buried, the whole business seems horrible. Fancy all the people crowding round to look at you and cry, while they talked as if you were already dead. When Polly Honiball was dying, old Vrouw Meyers asked her if she could see anything yet. Ugh!"

The old lady shook her head. "That's not the way to look at it," she replied. "A good death is the sign of a good life; or anyhow, that's how people judge it. It's as well to give no room for talk afterwards, Katje. And as for

A GOOD END

the mere death, no good Christian fears that. Why, I have known a man seek death ! ”

“ Did he kill himself ? ” inquired Katje.

“ Kill himself ! Indeed he didn’t. That would be a crime, and a dreadful scandal. No, he took death by the hand in a most seemly and respectable way, and his family were always thought the better of for it.

“ Yes, I’ll tell you about it. It will be a lesson to you, Katje, and I hope you will think about it and take it to heart.

“ The man I am talking about was Mynheer Andries van der Linden, a most godly and prosperous Burgher, whose farm was on the High Veld. All the days of his life he walked uprightly, and married twice. His sons and daughters were many, and all good, save for one sidelong skellum, Piet, his second son, who afterwards went to live among the English. He had cattle and sheep at pasture for miles, and a kerk on his land, where his nephew, the Predikant, used to preach. And by reason of his sanctity and cleverness Andries grew richer and richer till the Burghers respected him so

TALES FROM THE VELDT

much that they made him a commandant and a member of the Church Council.

“All prospered with him, as I was telling you, until one day it seemed as if God’s hand had fallen from him. He was smitten with a disease of which not the oldest woman in the district had ever seen the like, and his own flesh became a curse to him. The very marrow in his bones bred fire to feed on his body, and he lay on his bed in the torments of hell. For weeks he writhed and screamed like a madman, tossing on his blankets and tearing at his body, or struggling and howling as his sons held him down for fear he should injure himself in his frenzy. The whole thing was very terrible and mysterious; and it was said among the farms that Andries van der Linden could not have been so good after all, or God would not thus visit him with such a scourge.

“For myself, I never believed this, and what he afterwards did will show that I had the right of it. Still, good or bad, the affliction was undeniable, for I myself heard him screaming like a beast as I drove to Nachtmaal.

A GOOD END

“The malady lasted for months, and all herbs and pills that were given him did not an atom of good. Even the Kafirs could do nothing, though Klein Andries, the old man’s eldest son and a good lad, caught a witch-doctor and sjamboked him to pieces to make him help. In short, the illness was plainly beyond mortal cure, and the old man at last came to see this.

“I should have told you that he had times of peace, when the agony forsook him, and left him limp like a wet clout. Then he would sweat and quake with terror of the pains that would return ; and so pitiful was his condition that he could not even listen with a proper patience to the reading of Scripture or the singing of David’s psalms. You will see from this what a terrible visitation to a God-fearing man this illness was.

“So he made up his mind. One morning early, while quietness was with him, he called for Klein Andries and bade him shut the door of the room.

“‘Andries,’ he said, ‘I have been thinking

TALES FROM THE VELDT

the matter to a finish, and I am determined to have an end to this torment.'

"'Have you found any means?' began Klein Andries.

"'Listen,' said the old man. 'It is plain to me that I shall gain no cure on earth, and I have decided to die. So I shall die at the end of a week about two hours after sunrise.'

"Andries was of course very much taken aback. 'I do not understand,' he said. 'You cannot mean to kill yourself?'

"'Of course not,' answered the old man. 'That will be your part.'

"'How do you mean?' cried Andries.

"'I shall lie here in my bed, with clean pillows and fresh sheets, and the best coverlet. Our people will all be here,—you will see to that,—and when I have spoken to them and shaken their hands, you shall bring in your rifle ——'

"'That will do,' said Klein Andries. 'You need tell me no more. I will not do it.'

"'But you are my first-born,' said the father.

"'It is all the same; I will not do it.'

A GOOD END

“‘Then you can get out of my house, with your wife and your children, and go look for a stone on which to lay your heads.’

“‘That is very easy,’ answered Klein Andries, quite calmly. ‘No doubt we shall find that stone you speak of.’

“‘And I will get Piet to do it,’ said the old man.

“‘No,’ replied Klein Andries. ‘Piet shall not do it. Nobody shall do it. I will not have it done.’

“‘Andries,’ said the old man, ‘you and I must not talk thus. I am your father, and I tell you to do me this service. Say rather, I ask it of you. It is no more than an act of kindness to a stricken man; your hand on the gun will be the hand of mercy.’

“‘But I *cannot* do it,’ cried out Klein Andries in a sort of pain.

“‘You will do it,’ said the old man. ‘Remember you are the eldest of my sons. You will do it, Andries?’

“‘No,’ said Andries.

“‘You will do it?’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘No!’

“‘Then, Andries,’ said the old man, half raising himself as he lay, and pointing a finger at his son—‘then, Andries, eldest son and dearest and all, I will curse you.’

“For a full minute the two looked each other in the eyes, and then Klein Andries let his hand fall on his knee like a man beaten and broken.

“‘It shall be as you say,’ he answered at last. ‘I will do what you ask, but—it will spoil my life for me.’

“‘Thank you, my son,’ said the old man, sinking back.

“‘Oh, I will do it,’ said Andries. ‘But I hold it a sin, a black and bloody sin, that I commit with open eyes and a full knowledge. But I will do it.’

“So the thing happened, and all that week before his death the old man suffered little. As he said himself, his last taste of life was sweet in his mouth. He thought much upon his grave and the manner of his burying, and would often talk with Klein Andries and Piet, and give them directions.

A GOOD END

“‘I will not be buried in the kraal,’ he said one day. ‘My sister Greta never had any love for me, and I had just as lief not disturb her. Put me on top of the hill there ; I was always one for an open view.’

“From where he lay he could see through the window the place where he desired to be buried, and the grave of his cousin Cornel, dead twenty years before.

“‘Put me, then, on top of the hill,’ he said, ‘and I shall be able to overlook Cornel. He has a head-board with a round top, so you will give me two boards, one at my head and one at my feet, both with round tops. You would not have that carrion triumph over me?’

“‘It shall be done,’ said Andries.

“‘And you might carve a verse on my head-board,’ the old man went on. ‘Cornel has only his name and dates, and no doubt he counts on my having no more. His board is only painted ; see that you carve mine.’

“‘I do not carve letters very well,’ began Andries, ‘but ——’

“‘Oh, you carve well enough,’ said the old

TALES FROM THE VELDT

man. 'Very well indeed, considering. You won't have to do very much. There are plenty of short verses in the Psalms, and some—very good ones, too—in Proverbs. The Predikant will soon choose a verse of the right sort. Say a verse, Andries ; it is not much.'

" 'I will see to it,' said Andries.

"Then Piet, whose mind was a dunghill, had a horrible thought. 'But what about the water?' he cried, for the stream from which they took their drinking-water ran past the foot of the hill.

" 'You must draw your water higher up, answered the old man. 'If I were not about to die, Piet, and therefore under a need to judge not, lest I be judged, I would cut down your oxen and sheep for that. Go out ; I will say what I have to say to Andries.'

"When Piet was gone he went on. 'Remember, Andries, a bare four foot, no more. I would not wish to be late when the dead arise. Just four foot of cool earth, and a black coffin with plenty of room in it.'

" 'I will take care,' replied Klein Andries.

" 'Very well, do as I have told you, and I

A GOOD END

shall be very well off. I shall sleep without pain till the last day, and perhaps dream in peace about the verse on my head-board and the round tops.'

"Although I like a man to take it bravely, I can very well understand that that week must have been a terrible one for Klein Andries, who, though a good lad, and a wealthy man at this day, never was particularly quick at taking up an idea. He went about with a bowed head and empty eyes, like a man in mortal shame ; and I believe that never since has he quite cast off the load his father laid on him. Not that I see any harm in the affair myself.

"Well, in proper course the day came, and Andries van der Linden lay in his bed between the fresh sheets, propped up with fine clean pillows. His people had come from near and far, for the curious story was well known, and they were proud of their kinsman. They crowded the room in which he lay, all in their best clothes, a little uneasy, as most folks are on great occasions, and all very quiet.

"Old Andries van der Linden was free from

TALES FROM THE VELDT

pain, and spoke to them all in very cheerful and impressing words. As he lay among his pillows with his white hair thrown back and his beard on his breast, he was a fine man to see—a picture of a good and a brave man. He read aloud from the Bible, and then prayed awhile, giving out his words grandly and without a quaver. Then he shook them all by the hand and bade each one good-bye.

“‘Now, Andries,’ he said, and lay back smiling.

“Klein Andries stood at the foot of the bed with his rifle resting across the rail, but he dropped his head with a sob.

“‘I cannot,’ he said, ‘I cannot.’

“‘Come, Andries,’ said the old man again. ‘Come, my son.’

“Then Klein Andries caught his breath in his throat and steadied the rifle. The old man lay calmly, still smiling, with fearless eyes.

“‘Close your eyes,’ said Andries hoarsely, and as the old man did so he fired.

“The windows of the room were blown outwards and broken, but the shot was a true

A GOOD END

one, and the work was well and workmanlike done."

"It must have spoiled the sheets," observed Katje.

VASCO'S SWEETHEART

“**A**S to that,” said the Vrouw Grobelaar, answering a point that no one had raised, “it has been seen over and over again that sin leaves its mark. Do you not trust or avoid a man because there is honor or wickedness in his face? Ah, men’s faces are the writing on the wall, and only the Belshazzars cannot read them.

“But the marks go deeper than a lowering brow or a cruel mouth. Men may die and leave behind them no monuments save their sin. Of such a case I remember one instance.

“Before my second husband was married to his first wife he lived out yonder, on the Portuguese border, and in the thick of the fever country. I have not seen the place, but it is badly spoken of for a desolate, unchancy land, bad for cattle, and only good to hunters. My second husband was a great hunter, and died, as you know, through having his body crushed

VASCO'S SWEETHEART

by a lion. The people out there are not good Boer stock, but a wild and savage folk, with dark blood in them.

"I only know this story from my second husband, but it took hold of me, as he used to tell it. There was a family in those parts of the name of Preez. No relation to the Du Preez you know, who are well enough in their way, but Preez simply,—a short name and a bad one. They were big holders of land, with every reason to be rich, but bad farmers, lazy hunters, and deep drinkers. The Kafirs down there make a drink out of fruit which is very fiery and conquers a man quickly, and these people were always to be seen half drunk, or else stupid from the stuff. Old Preez, the father, in particular, was a terrible man, by all tellings; full threescore and ten years of age, but strong, fiery, and full of oaths. My second husband used to say there was something in the look of him that daunted one; for his hair and his beard were white, his face was savagely red, and his eyes were like hot coals. And with it all he had a way of looking on you that made

TALES FROM THE VELDT

you run from him. When he was down with drink and fever he would cry out in a terrible voice that his mother was a queen's daughter and he was a prince."

"I have heard of the people you speak of," I said. "They are half-Portuguese, and perhaps the old man was not wholly lying."

"Um! Well, prince or not, he married in his youth a woman of the half-blood, and begot of her a troop of devils. Five sons he had, all great men, knowing not God and fearing none of God's works. And after them came a daughter, a puling slip of a thing, never meant to live, whom they did to death among them with their drinking and blaspheming and fighting.

"My second husband told me tales of that family that set my blood freezing. He had his own way of telling stories, and made you see pictures, as it were. Once, he used to say, for a trifle spoken concerning them and their ways, they visited a missionary by night, dragged him from his bed, and crucified him against his door, while his wife clung to the old man's

VASCO'S SWEETHEART

knees and besought the mercy they never gave and never got. Even the wild folk of the countryside were stricken with the horror and impiety of the deed ; and it says much for the fear in which the Preez family were held that none molested them or called them to account.

“ In the end the eldest of the five sons took a mind to marry and to leave some of his accursed stock to plague the world when it should be delivered from him and his brothers. They cast about for a wife for him, and were not content with the first that offered. They had their pride, the Preez, and in their place a fair measure of respect, for among the wicked, you know, the devil is king. From one farmhouse to another they rode, dragging forth women and girls to be looked at like cattle. Many a tall, black-browed hussy would have been content to go away with Vasco Preez (such was his unchristian name), but he was not willing to do right by any of them.

“ They were returning home from one of these expeditions when they passed a lowly house beside the road with no fence around it. But be-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

fore the house a girl stood on the grass, with her *kapje* in her hand, to see the six big men ride by. She was little and slim, and, unlike the maidens of the country, whitish, with a bunch of yellow hair on the top of her head and hanging over her ears. The others would have passed her by, judging her unworthy even an insult, but Vasco reined in his horse and shouted a great oath.

“‘The woman for me!’ he cried. ‘The woman I was looking for! I never knew what I wanted before.’

“The others halted to look, and the girl, frightened, ran into the house. Vasco got down from his horse.

“‘Fetch the filly out,’ shouted the old man. ‘Fetch her out and let us see her paces.’

“Vasco walked straight into the little house, while the others waited, laughing. They heard no screams and no fighting, and presently out comes Vasco alone.

“He went over to his horse and mounted. ‘There is nothing to wait for,’ he said. ‘Let us be getting on.’

VASCO'S SWEETHEART

“‘But the girl?’ cried one of his brothers.
‘Is she dead, or what?’

“‘No,’ said Vasco, ‘but she would not come.’

“‘Would not come!’ bellowed the old father,
while the others laughed. ‘Did you say she
would not come?’

“‘That is what I said,’ answered Vasco, sitting his horse very straight, and scowling at the lot of them.

“‘He has a fever,’ cried the old man, looking from one to another. ‘He is light in the head. My faith! I believe the girl has been beating him with a stick. Here, one of you,’ he roared, turning on them, ‘get down and kick the girl out of the door. We’ll have a look at the witch!’

“Koos, the youngest, sprang from his saddle and made towards the house; but he was not gone five paces before Vasco spurred his horse on to him and knocked him down.

“‘Keep off,’ he said then, turning to face them all, as Koos rose slowly. ‘If I cannot bring the girl out none of you can, and you had better not try. Whoever does will be hurt, for I shall stand in front of the door.’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"And he went straight to the house, and, dismounting, stood in the doorway, with his hands resting on the beam above his head. He was a big man, and he filled the door.

"‘Hear him,’ foamed the old father. ‘God, if I were as young as any of you, I would drag the girl across his body. Sons, he has defied us, and the girl has bewitched him. Run at him, lads, and bring them both out!’

"They all came towards the house in a body, but stopped when Vasco raised his hand.

"‘I warn you,’ he told them—‘I warn you to let the matter be. This will not be an affair of fighting, with only broken bones to mend when it is over. If I take hold of any one after this warning, that man will be cold before the sun sets. And to show you how useless this quarrel is, I will ask the girl once more if she will come out. You all saw her?’

"‘Yes,’ they answered; ‘but what is this foolery about asking her?’

"‘You saw her—very well.’ He raised his voice and called into the house, ‘Meisje, will you not come out? I ask you to.’

VASCO'S SWEETHEART

"There was silence for a moment, and then they heard the answer. 'No,' it said; 'I will stay where I am. And you are to go away.'

"'As soon as may be, my girl,' called Vasco in answer. 'Now,' he said to the men, 'you see she will not come.'

"'But, man, in the name of God, cast her over your shoulder and carry her out,' cried the father.

"Vasco looked at him. 'Not this one,' he said. 'She shall do as she pleases.'

"Then they rushed on him, but he stepped out from the door, and caught young Koos round the middle. With one giant's heave he raised him aloft and dashed him at the gang, scattering them right and left, and knocking one to the ground, where he remained motionless. But Koos lay like a broken tool or a smashed vessel, as dead men lie. And all the while Vasco talked to them.

"'Come on,' he was saying. 'Come all of you. We shall never do anything but fight now. I see plainly we ought to have fought long ago. Bring her out, indeed.'

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"They paused after that, aghast at the fury of the man they were contending against. But the old man gave them no rest.

"‘Get sticks,’ he cried to them—‘get sticks and kill him.’

"They dragged beams from a hut roof, and one of them took a heavy stone. Vasco stood back and watched them till they came forward again.

"The one with the stone came first, but it was too big to throw from a distance, and he dared not go near. The others approached with caution, and Vasco stood still, with his hands resting as before at the top of the door. They were bewildered at his manner, and very cautious, but at length they drew near and rushed at him.

"Then a most astonishing thing happened. With one wrench Vasco tore the thick architrave from the wall, a beam as thick as a man's thigh, and smote into the middle of them. Where he hit the bone gave and the flesh fell away, and as they ran from before him the wall fell in.

VASCO'S SWEETHEART

"Down came the wall, and with it the heavy beams on the roof. The old father, cursing over a broken arm, heard the girl scream, and saw the wreck come crashing about Vasco's shoulders till he disappeared below it. And then, where the house had been stood a ruin, with two souls buried in the midst of it.

"It steadied them like a dash of cold water. However they might fight among themselves, they were loyal to one another. Besides the old father, with his broken arm, there was only one other that could put a hand to the work, and together they started to drag away the beams and bricks and stones that covered Vasco and the girl.

"I know they were wicked men who are in hell long since, but I cannot contain a sort of admiration for the spirit that fastened them to their toil all that long night,—the old man with his broken arm, the young one with a dozen horrid wounds. As the sky paled towards morning, they discovered the girl dead, and leaving her where she lay they wrought on to uncover Vasco.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"When they found him he was crushed and broken, and pierced in many places with splinters and jagged broken ends of wood. But he had his senses still, and smiled as they cleared the thatch from above his face.

"The old man looked at him carefully. 'You are dying, my son,' he said.

"'Of course,' answered Vasco. 'Is that Renault?' He smiled again at his brother. 'So there are two of you alive, anyhow. How about the others?'

"'Two dead,' answered his father. 'And the other will not walk again all his days. You are a terrible fighter, my son.'

"'Yes,' answered Vasco, in a faint voice. 'It was the girl, you see.'

"'She was a witch, then?' asked the old man.

"'No,' said Vasco smiling. 'Or perhaps, yes. I do not know. But I will fight for her again if you like.'

"'Oho! so that is it,' and the old man knelt down beside him. 'Now, I see,' he said. 'I never guessed before—did not know it was in you. My son, I ask you to forgive us.'

VASCO'S SWEETHEART

"‘I forgive, but where is she?’

"‘Dead. No, it was none of our doing. You did it,—the roof fell on her. We will lay you together.’

"‘Do so,’ replied Vasco. ‘I think I am dying now.’

"‘Yes,’ answered the father. ‘Your face is becoming gray. Your throat will rattle in a minute. Look here; this is what my mother used to do.’

"And he did thus," said the Vrouw Grobelaar, giving a very good imitation of the sign of the cross.

"But that was not a bad ending," cried Katje. "I think it was beautiful. I hope Vasco and the girl went straight to God."

The Vrouw Grobelaar sighed.

THE PERUVIAN

FROM her pocket Katje produced stealthily a clean-scoured wish-bone. The Vrouw Grobelaar was sleeping in her chair with tight-shut eyes. So I took one end of the bone, and we broke it, and the wish remained with Katje.

“Wish quick,” I said.

She puckered her pretty brows with a charming childish thoughtfulness.

“I can’t think of anything to wish for,” she answered.

“Wish to be delivered from the sin of playing with witchcraft and dirty old bones!” The suggestion echoed roundly in the old lady’s deep tones, and we, startled and abashed, looked up to find her wide awake, and in her didactic mood. The Vrouw Grobelaar never slept to any real purpose. One might have remembered that.

“Yes, witchcraft,” she pursued. “For if

THE PERUVIAN

bones are not witchcraft, tell me what is? When a Hottentot wants to find a strayed ox, he makes magic with bones, doesn't he? And the bones of a dead baboon are dangerous things too. Katje, throw that bone away."

Katje, who hated to be found out, threw it over the rail of the stoop into the kraal. When the good Vrouw had kept her steady eye on me for a few seconds, I threw my half after Katje's.

"I thought so," said the Vrouw Grobelaar, with a twitch of the lips like a smile stillborn.

"It's only a game," said Katje plaintively. "There's no harm in it."

The old lady shook her head.

"There's harm in things you don't understand," she pronounced. "There's harm in falling in love, for instance, if you don't know what you are doing. But witchcraft is worse than anything. You've seen how hard it is to make a Kafir doctor show his tricks. That's because he's never certain which is master, he or the devil. I knew a man once, a Peruvian, who burned his fingers badly."

TALES FROM THE VELDT

A Peruvian, for the Vrouw Grobelaar, was any one for whose nationality she had no name. In Johannesburg it means a Polish Jew ; in this instance I believe the man was a Greek.

"He was a smouser" (pedlar), she went on, "a little cowering man, with a black beard and a white face, who spoke Kafir better than he spoke the Taal. He sold thimbles and pills and hymn-books to the wives and daughters of Burghers, and grand watches and cheap diamonds to the Kafirs. It was a dirty little trade, and there was nothing about the man that streaked it with nobility. I remember a Scotch smouser, who was called Peter Piper, who sold pills like a chemist, and everybody liked him and respected him, till he had his great dispute with the Predikant at Dopfontein. But this little man was like a slimy thing made to crawl on its belly ; and many is the time he would have been sjamboked from a door, were it not for—well, I don't know. But he was such a mean helpless thing, that, when he shrank away and looked up, with his white eyes

THE PERUVIAN

staring and his lips parted, not the most wrathful Burgher could lift a whip.

“And even as he seemed to fear everything, the Kafirs certainly feared him. Kafirs, you know, go naked to all the little winds, and the breezes that will not hurt a thatch carry death to them. They are deaf to God, but the devil has but to whisper, and they hear. They bought shameful watches and sleepy diamonds from the Peruvian, as they kill a goat at the flowering of the crops—to appease something that might else visit them in the night. It was a thing much spoken of, and since even among the Burghers there are folks who dirty their fingers with magic and wish-bones—ay, you may well pout!—perhaps this had something to do with the fact that he was never flogged to the beacons and kicked across.

“In fact, there grew up about him a something of mystery, uncanny and not respectable. The little plodding man who went so meekly past our gates had a shadow one feared to tread on.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"You won't remember, but you will have heard of, the terrible to-do there was when Freda van der Byl disappeared. She was a most ordinary girl, perhaps eighteen years old, with a fine appetite, and nothing whatsoever about her that was strange or extraordinary : and yet one night she was missing, and it has never been set past doubt who saw her last. She was on the stoop in the afternoon, ate well at supper, went out then in the usual way to the hut where the tobacco-sacks were, and never came in again. She disappeared like a flame blown out, with never a spoor to give direction to those that sought her, without a shred of clothing on a thorn-bush to hint at a tale. She seemed to have fled clean out of the world—a big ten-stone girl with red hair melted like a bubble.

"And how they hunted for her ! Old Johannes van der Byl and his sons went through the country like locusts, and with them were a mob of relations and friends, and some prospectors from the Hangklip who betted about it. Every kloof was scoured, every Kafir stad and kraal

THE PERUVIAN

turned inside out, and the half of them burned. Their ponies streaked the long grass of the veld for miles; the men, their loaded rifles in hand, were abroad late and early; and yet they never found even a shoe-sole or a shred of hair to give them a clue. The witch-doctors would have been glad enough to find her, for they were flogged from morning to night, and Barend van der Byl beat the life out of one who did not seem to be doing his best. If Freda had been anywhere in the veld she would have been found, so fervently did the Kafirs hunt her in order to get a little peace and security.

“But nothing availed; no trace of her came to light, and even the women of her family grew tired of weeping. But one hot dusty afternoon, when her brothers Jacobus and Piet were riding home from the fruitless search, they came upon the Peruvian sitting under a bush smoking his yellow cigarettes. He glanced up at them as they went past, slavish as ever, yet still with that subtle significance of mien that made him noteworthy, and suddenly Jacobus reined up.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘Piet,’ he called, pointing with his sjambok. Look—our last chance!’

“Piet did not understand.

“‘We have been cutting the Kafir doctors into ribbons,’ explained Jacobus, ‘and they were no good. But here is a wizard, and a white one, who won’t wait to be flogged. If he can do nothing, then there is nothing to do. Let us bring him along, Piet.’

“Piet was a fat youth, deadly strong, who never spoke while there was work to do. He merely dropped from his saddle and caught the Peruvian deftly by the back of the neck. The smouser, of course, whined and squirmed, but Piet was the man who broke the bullock’s neck at Bothaskraal, and he made no difficulty of tying the little man’s wrists to his off stirrup. All his trinkets and fallals they left behind, and riding at a walk, talking calmly between themselves of the buck with wide horns that the Predikant’s cousin missed, they dragged the little smouser to the homestead.

“Several of the men had already come back, and when they heard Jacobus’s plan, some were

THE PERUVIAN

openly afraid and wished to have the Peruvian set loose. But Oom Johannes cursed at them and smacked Jacobus on the back.

“‘My daughter is lost, and evil tongues are active about her,’ he roared. ‘I want her back, and I don’t care how she comes. Come to supper, Jacobus; and afterwards you shall take your smouser into a hut and persuade him.’

“It was not an easy thing to make the Peruvian understand what was wanted of him. But by and by, when he had been argued with in Dutch and Kafir, and shown a skull that was found in a kloof, and the *dol oss*, and a picture in the Bible of the Witch of Endor, he suddenly grasped the idea, and grinned. Piet spat on the ground as the white teeth gleamed through the greasy black beard.

“‘Yes, perhaps I can do that,’ said the Peruvian, in the Taal. ‘Perhaps, but one cannot be sure. You will pay, eh?’

“Jacobus wanted to threaten, but Oom Johannes would not have it.

“‘Find my girl,’ he said, ‘and you shall be

TALES FROM THE VELDT

paid. Fifty pounds for any news of her, more if she is alive and well.'

"But the smouser explained that he could only find her if she were dead.

"‘I can get her to speak, perhaps,’ he said. ‘More? No!’

"At last Jacobus and Piet took him into one of the big huts and gave him the little lamp that he demanded. He set it in the middle of the floor, and when they pulled to the door behind them the big domed hut was still almost dark, save for the ring of quiet light in the centre that flickered a little.

"‘I wish he could do this kind of thing when I’m not there,’ grumbled Jacobus, who hated creepy things.

"‘Hush! be quiet!’ commanded the Peruvian, and the two young men sat down, very close together, with their backs to the door.

"The first thing that the Peruvian did was to take off all his clothes, and then he came into the dim circle of light mother-naked. He was a little man at best, but Piet said afterwards the muscles stood out under his swarthy skin in

THE PERUVIAN

knots and ridges. And there he stood, facing them across the lamp, with his arms stretched forwards and his hands just fluttering loosely. Nothing more. His eyes were upturned and his face lifted, so that a streak of shadow rose across it, and the black beard against his neck rose and fell with his breathing. But for the gentle flutter of his hands and the heave of his chest he was still as stone—so still that for those who watched him all relation to human kind seemed to leave him, and he was a being alone in a twilight world of his own, a creature as remote and as little to be understood as the spirits of the dead.

“Have you ever, when wakeful in a hot night, with darkness all about you, called yourself by name again and again? It was a trick we dared sometimes when I was a girl. After a while it is something else that is calling, something of you but not in you, to which your soul answers at last; and if you go on till the will to call is no longer your own, the soul goes forth in response to it, and you are dead. And even so, gaunt in the beam of the lamp, the

TALES FROM THE VELDT

Peruvian seemed to insist upon himself, till the eyes of the watchers were for him only, till that which they saw was less the mean body of the smouser than the vehicle of the potent soul within.

“Piet was a youth as solid in mind as in body, and ere the scene grasped him against his will he says he saw with an angry impatience the flicker of a leer on the darkened face of the Peruvian. But it did not last. In a few minutes the two young Burghers were not the only ones whom the spell had subdued—the wizard was netted too. And then, as he stood, his hands still fluttering, they heard him drone a string of words, a dull chant, level like an incantation, inevitably apt to the hour and the event.

“They did not know how long they crouched, watching unwinkingly till their eyes grew sore; but at last it seemed that the posturing and the words had made something due. Jacobus started as though from sleep, and Piet, who was not till then frightened, looked up quickly. He caught sight of something—a shadow, a

THE PERUVIAN

hint, a presence in the darkness behind the naked man, and knew, somehow, with a coldness of alarm, that IT had arrived. He barely realized this knowledge when the power of the quietness and the jugglery were rudely sundered, and the Peruvian, shrieking and clucking in his throat, dived towards them and tried to hide. He plunged frantically against the door, which gave and let him fall through, and in a moment, with the cold sweat of horror upon them, Piet and Jacobus struggled through after him and ran with still hearts for the house.

“But in that moment that he was jammed in the narrow doorway with his brother, Piet saw into the hut, and there was something there. There was another with them.

“They came fast to the lighted room upon the heels of the naked Peruvian, who fell on his face and writhed, weeping in sheer terror. There was alarm, and chairs overturned, and screaming of women, and it was long before they could get the smouser to his feet and bring him to speech. And then he would not go a foot away from them.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘It came; it came!’ he babbled, quivering under the table-cloth they had cast over his nakedness. ‘It came—behind me!’ and forthwith he began to stammer in his own strange tongue.

“‘What was it?’ demanded Oom Johannes, who was beginning to feel nervous.

“‘There was a ghost!’ was all that Piet could tell him. ‘It frightened the smouser. It frightened all of us.’

“And by this time the smouser was babbling again, turning from one to the other, like one who excuses himself.

“‘I did not bring it,’ he wailed. ‘I did nothing—only tricks. Just tricks to get money—and it came behind me. Mother of God! It came behind me!’

“Not one of them ventured beyond the door that night. They had not even the heart to turn the smouser out, though he expected nothing less, and clung howling to Piet’s knees when the lad rose to bolt the door. But in the morning he was gone, and”—here the Vrouw

THE PERUVIAN

Grobelaar became truly impressive—"he had not even fetched his clothes from the hut.

"So you see, Katje, what comes of messing your fingers with wish-bones."

"Pooh!" sneered Katje, "I'm not afraid of the ghost of the fowl."

TAGALASH

WHEN we came to the farmhouse, Katje and I, the Vrouw Grobelaar asked if we had been down by the spruit. We had—all the afternoon. There are cool and lonely places in the long grass beside the spruit, where its midsummer trickle of water sojourns peacefully in wide pools of depth and quiet.

“You can’t mind that, anyhow,” said Katje patiently.

“Why can’t I?” demanded the Vrouw Grobelaar. “Why can’t I mind that as well as anything else? I tell you, my girl, that things are not quite so simple as you take them to be. Even a herd of swine can house a devil, mark you. A bit of stick in the path can be a puff-adder, and there are spells tucked away in the words of the Psalms even. And the spruit! Why, you crazy child, a spruit is just the place for things to lurk in wait. Yes, slippery things

TAGALASH

that have no name in man's speech. Even the Kafirs know of a spirit that lives in a pool."

Katje laughed. "Oh, Tagalash!" she said.

Tagalash is the little god who abducts girls who go down to fetch water in the evening, and carries them away to the dim world under the floor of the pools to be his brides. He lives in the water, and sings in the reeds, sometimes, of an evening and at other times works mischief among the crops and the cattle with spells that baffle the husbandman.

So Katje laughed as she mentioned him, and the Vrouw Grobelaar bridled ominously.

"You laugh," she said scathingly—"you laugh in the face of wisdom and counsel as they laughed in Sodom and Gomorrah. Yes, Tagalash, Katje! What have you to say against Tagalash? You think, I suppose, that he doesn't exist. I tell you, my girl, there's many a god of the heathen who is a devil of the Christians. That's what Christianity is for—to make devils of the gods of the heathen. And besides, this Tagalash is not like the others. He has been seen."

TALES FROM THE VELDT

She paused. "Who by, Tante?" I asked, while Katje affected to whistle carelessly.

"Ah," she said, "you want to know? Well, Tagalash was seen and felt and had speech of by one who told it afterwards with white lips and fevered eyes that compelled belief. A Boer woman, mind you, and no liar; the young wife of an upright and well-seen Burgher, who had his farm an easy four hours from here.

"It is Polly Joubert I mean, who married when she was eighteen one Johannes Olivier, a youth with hair like an Irishman—all red. I had known her somewhat, and she was just that kind of girl in whom one feels the thrust of a fate. She was thin, for one thing, and without any of the comfortable comeliness that makes young men doubtful and old men sure. She had a face that was always rapt, lips that parted of themselves as if in wonder at great things newly seen, and big troubled eyes that spoke, despite her leanness and long legs, of a spring of hot blood crouching within her. Yes, she seemed doomed to something far and tragic, and outside the lives of decent stupid men.

TAGALASH

There was much bother, I believe, to persuade her to a marriage with Johannes, though he was rich enough.

“Perhaps it was hard on her, but then it must have been hard on him too. For he was another kind than she; just a big youth that ate four times a-day with desperation, and lived the rest of the time as a tree lives. There is no harm in such men, though; it is they that people this world and have the right to guide it, for they put most into it and hew most from it; but for those who are born with a streak of heaven or hell in their fabric, they are heavy companions at the best. But these two married at last, and faced life like oxen that pull different ways in the same yoke. And within a month Johannes walked about with a face like one who tries to guess a riddle—troubled and puzzled; and Polly was walking elsewhere, carving herself a new religion from the stones of the bitterness of life.

“I have the rest from her own lips, as she told it when she came back. Yes, she went away—I will make that plain enough. It was

TALES FROM THE VELDT

after a quarrel with Johannes over some little grossness of no consequence that she walked forth from the house and down towards the spruit. It was between afternoon and evening, and she sought a quiet place to sit and prey on her heart. There was a pool that summer, deep and very black, lying between steep banks on which grew bushes and tall grass, and to this she came and sat by the edge of the water, and dabbled her long thin fingers in its coolness and let her thoughts surge in her.

“ ‘I thought of death,’ she said, as she sat in her chair and told of it—‘of death, and peace, and hatred glutted, and dead enemies, and love, and sin.’ A wild storm of dreams, was it not? A grim tempest to lay waste a sore heart. And she only eighteen, with eyes like lakes on a mountainside! As she told it, she cast back on her memory—you could see she was aching to strip her fault naked and scourge it before us all—‘And the thoughts were like a sleeping-draught to my anger,’ she went on pitifully. ‘I drowned my wrath in dreams of vengeance and sinful hopes of a joy to find in the future.

TAGALASH

I conjured up faces of eager, bold men who should court me, and one that I had thought on before—a small man, lean at the waist, who moved like a spark among burning wood, and laughed ere he struck.' Her finger travelled in the air, and he was plain to see.

"She went on : 'I was looking in the water between my hands, creating my lover by the spell of desire, and I could see his face in the vortex my fingers made as I moved them to and fro. I gazed and gazed and gazed, and then, suddenly, some fear gripped me, for the face became a face of a man, with the idle water swilling across it. But it was a face : my mind battled against the realization till the fact governed it. It was a face, brown and keen and smiling with a gleam of white teeth, and then a hand met my hand in the water and drew me forward. I did not drag back. I think I fell on my face, but here I have no memory.'

"When again she came to a sense of things, she was lying in a dim place where all that moved seemed shadows only. At first it was

TALES FROM THE VELDT

her thought that she was yet on the bank by the pool, but as her mind renewed its hold she knew this was not so. She breathed an air alien to her living nostrils, and knew that here she had no part in a world of human creatures, and the thought rose in her that she was dead, drowned in the pool, and had reached the next world. 'Can this be hell?' she wondered, as she rose to a sitting posture and strove to see about her.

"It was a grassed mound she sat on, in a kind of plain, and she heard the creaking of bushes about her where no wind breathed on her cheek. The dimness was not the part-darkness of a summer night, but a shadow where no sun had ever shone, a barren gloom that was lugubrious and uneasy. A dozen feet from her all was blurred and not to be distinguished, but it seemed to her that many people moved round about her, and now and again there was a rustle of hushed voices, as of folk who met stealthily and spoke with checked breath. In the dimness shapes moved, faintly suggested to her eyes, and presently, though

TAGALASH

she had no thrill of fear, a loneliness oppressed her that nearly made her weep. She was not as one that has no comrade in the world, for such a one is at least kin by blood and flesh to all others. She was alone, as a living man in a tomb is alone.

“With a little fervor of troubled recollection, like a child reciting a psalm, she told us how she rose to her feet and gazed about her, pondering which way to take. And while she was yet doubtful a hand touched her elbow, and she started to face a man that had come from behind her. Staring at his face with wits clenched like a fist, the contours of the face in the water returned to her mind, the sharp brown face that had grown up in the middle of the countenance she dreamed upon, and she knew in a moment that here was the face again and the rest of the man with it.

“‘I knew it at once when his teeth shone through his smile,’ she said. ‘He was not so tall as I, and very brown in that sorrowful light, but not black. There was a robe he wore from his neck to his ankles that left one arm bare and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

the little feet below its hem, and his head was bare with straight black hair upon it. His hand was on my arm, and he stood before me and looked in my face and smiled a little at me, very gently and timidly.'

"It seems he found her scarcely less strange than she found him. In his bearing was something of awe and wonder, while she stared with a mere surprise.

"'Are you a man?' she asked at length, stupidly.

"He smiled yet. 'No,' he answered gently. 'But oh, you are beautiful!'

"She replied nothing at first, and he went on with a soft voice like the voice of a tender child. 'I saw you in the water long ago, I looking up to you, you looking down to where I was hidden. I smiled to you and reached my hand, but there was no smile on your face, and I did not dare take you till—till this time. Then your hands were stretched forward, and as I clasped them you sank to me,—my beloved! my beloved!'

"His brown face glowed upon his words

TAGALASH

with a fire of worship. She started back from him with a quick terror, hands clasped and lips parted.

“‘Tell me,’ she cried, ‘tell me, where am I? What is this place? Am I dead at last?’

“He soothed her. ‘You are in my country,’ he said very gently. ‘Now it is your country, as I am yours. You are not dead but living, and brimming with the love I languish for; and here you will stay with me, and we will love one another very tenderly in the heart of my gloom, and you will be my bride.

“‘Oh, listen to me!’ he cried, when she would have answered. ‘Many slim and delicate girls have come to me through the mirror of the pool, but none such as you, with a warm soul floating on your face and a bosom aching for love. When first I saw you I yearned for you, I coveted you. The thought of you was my food and drink, and stayed my eyes from sleep; I set my spell on the waters that they should slumber and hold your image unbroken, and now I have you; you are here with me. You are mine.’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"He was glowing with a kind of eagerness it hurts one to rebuff, and she watched him, her fears under control, with a growing wonder.

"‘Yes,’ she said slowly. ‘It must be true, then—that old tale. You are Tagalash!’

"He smiled. ‘I am Tagalash,’ he answered.

"‘But,’ she said, ‘I am white!’ For no one had ever heard of any but Kafir brides for Tagalash.

"He shrank a little, but smiled yet beseechingly, as he would have her cease that part of the tale.

"‘You are so beautiful,’ he urged. ‘Come with me to my house, will you not?’

"But that she would not do, and moved not from her place on the grassed knoll throughout her stay in the shadows—something like a week.

"‘I am the wife of Johannes Olivier,’ she said, and her words sounded foolish in her own ears. ‘I am a wife,’ she persisted, there in that dead land of the black gods. ‘I want to go back,’ she cried like a strayed child. ‘I want to go back. I am afraid. Take me back to the light.’

TAGALASH

"He tried to comfort her with gentle words and talk of his passion and her beauty, but to no effect. She shrank from the unnatural flesh of him ; she panted as though the dust of tombs were in her nostrils ; and at last he stood off, looking at her with a mild trouble, and then he went away, and she was sitting once more alone amid the traffic of hushed voices and moving shadows.

" 'There came no night,' she told us, in a voice that quavered uncertainly, 'always that unlovely twilight only ; and I sat on the grass and wept.' She had no sensation of hunger or sleep in that world, the whole of her stay. She stayed in the same place, dreary and waiting, with no active hope and little fear—only a longing for the sunlight ; and at last a dull pain of yearning for the rough red head and beefy texture of her human husband. A week, mind you—a week she stayed there thus, save when Tagalash would come up unheard to court her again.

"After that first time he was a more cautious lover, and sat at her feet with lowered eyes

TALES FROM THE VELDT

pleading with her. One answer always stilled him, and that was her cry of 'Take me back ; I am afraid.'

" 'You were not fashioned for a rude love,' he said to her once.

" 'Ah,' she answered then, 'but there is that in me that welcomes a heavy hand and a strong arm.'

" 'The others are like that,' he answered, as though speaking to himself. 'But they have no such hungry beauty as you.'

" 'My beauty,' she told him, 'is a chance vessel for a mere woman's soul.'

" At last he became wistful, and seemed afraid to ask for what he desired. 'But I can yet give to you,' he told her. 'Say what you would have. I can bring it you.'

" 'Then give me back to my world,' she cried. 'Do that, and I will thank you on my knees.'

" He sighed. 'Is that all you desire?' he said. 'Supposing I granted you that, is there nothing you would take back with you?'

" 'No,' she answered.

TAGALASH

“‘No charm?’ he asked again. ‘Not a charm to compel love? I can give you even that.’

“‘Take me back,’ she begged, ‘and teach me how to win my husband to forgive me.’

“He smiled very sadly, and she could almost have pitied him, so poor he seemed, bereaved of his desire.

“‘You are greater than Tagalash,’ he said slowly, ‘since you make a slave of him. You shall have what you will. Go back to your world, my beloved, my love that shall henceforth dread the still pools.’

“‘So I came back,’ she said, looking round on us as though all were explained.

“‘How?’ we asked.

“‘Why, I came,’ she answered plaintively, and had no more to tell. She had been found sleeping on the grass near the spruit, after a week of absence during which the men of the district had combed the very bushes for a trace of her.

“‘But the charm?’ asked one of us. ‘The charm to win forgiveness? What was that?’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"She looked timidly at the tall Johannes who stood by her chair in silence.

" 'I have forgotten what it was,' she answered with wet eyes.

" 'No,' he cried, bending to her lips. 'No! It is a true charm that, my *kleintje*.' "

"Good old Tagalash!" remarked Katje cheerfully.

THE HOME KRAAL

AFTER sunset on a summer's day, when evening has overcome the oppression of the still heat and breezes grow up like thoughts, the world of veld becomes odorous, and every air has its burden of unforgettable scents.

As we sat in the stoop, steeped in a flood of shadow, looking down over the kraals to where the grasses are ever green about the spruit, the Vrouw Grobelaar spoke gently.

"I should remember this," she said, "after a hundred years of heaven. The winds of Mooimeisjes would call me even then."

Katje's hand moved in mine.

"It is home," said Katje. "It—it makes me want to cry."

The Vrouw Grobelaar smiled. "As for me," she answered, "it makes me think of nothing so much as that hollow beside Cornel's grave, where, in my time, I shall go to my long dream-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

ing. This place has peace written large on its face; and ah! it is at home that one would like to lie at last. Yes, none of your damp churchyards for me! The home kraal, like a Boer vrouw; for the grave and the home are never quite two things to us Boers. How some have striven for the home kraal, that feared to lie with strangers! *Allemachtag*, yes!"

She moved a little in her armchair, and we waited in silence for the tale to come. Katje came closer to me, in that way she has, like a dear child or a little dog.

"The Vrouw van der Westhuizen," said the old lady, "had but one child, a son. Emmanuel, she called him, for a dozen poor reasons; and for him and in him she had her whole life. The poor, they say, are rich in poor things, and this lad grew to manhood with a multitude of mean little vices and dirty ways which showed like a sign on his pale weak face, and summed up the trivial soul within for you at the first glance. Most of us have cause to thank God that He has not written on our faces; but Emmanuel could have

THE HOME KRAAL

carried no writing large enough for his mother to read. Because he was weak and idle, two of her nephews lived on the farm, Barend and Peter van Trump, great slow true men, with hearts like children; yet she esteemed Emmanuel as much above them as they in truth, in all points of worth and virtue, were over him. Ah, but a mother is a traitor to the whole world.

"I remember this Emmanuel well. A bony small man of the color of straw, with eyes that moved too quickly and a cold hand, a body like a wisp of linen-cloth—so flimsy and slight—and some slenderness at the knee that made him shamble like a thief! Peter stood with a great brown hand on his shoulder, smiling at me with a frank open mouth and cheeks creased with pleasantry. When he laughed, his body shook mightily, and the motion of his hand made the other stagger. And the Vrouw van der Westhuizen stood there looking, with eyes like pools of pride for her son.

"There was nothing in the farm to hold Emmanuel, no charm in the veld nor interest in

TALES FROM THE VELDT

the work. He was barely a man when he would ride off to the dorp and its saloons, and in time he was there oftener and oftener, drinking and soiling his hands with all the strange foulness of life the English bring with them. We, the neighbors round about, marked it of course; but none thought much of Emmanuel and his doings; and the thing was little talked of till it became known that at last he was gone for good, and had betaken himself to live in a great town, among devilries that have no name in our clean Taal.

“It was a grievous blow for the Vrouw van der Westhuizen. From the time he departed, she became old; as she went about her affairs, the woe at her heart was plain to see. She was a stricken woman, the world had been cut from under her; and about her, now that her child was gone, she felt nothing familiar, but lived, dumb and bewildered, in a maze of strangers. Barend and Peter had no wits to console her. How, indeed, should they have hoped to console a mother thus bereft? The days lounged by inexorably, bringing no word of Emmanuel

THE HOME KRAAL

with them, and no mercy. Their footprints were the wounds upon the Vrouw van der Westhuizen's heart; and in the end she sickened wearily and lay listless, due to death.

"Then only did the silence break and let through a word of news. Some one—I cannot remember now who it was—had been to the town to a law-case to be cheated of some land, and he brought back news of Emmanuel—news that he was deadly ill in a mean place, and lacking money. He told it shortly to the Vrouw van der Westhuizen, and she sent at once for Barend and Peter.

"‘Get to your horses,’ she told them, ‘and bring my *kleintje* back to me. Be quick to bring him—why do you stand gaping like sick cows while he is dying? And take money. Take all the money that is in my box under the bed, in case he should need something. Get the box out quickly, now!’

"They obeyed her. In the box was the money of the house, as the Boers need to keep it, a great deal of money in sovereigns, very heavy to carry. But she would not even suffer

TALES FROM THE VELDT

them to count it, so they filled a bag with it, and Barend tied it to his belt, and then they caught the horses and started on the long trek to the town.

“It is a journey of fifteen days by wagon, yet those two, by killing horses—they who used all beasts so gently—did it in three, and on the fourth, much troubled by the great throng of people all about them, came to a narrow street, smelling of poor food, and found the house in which Emmanuel lay. A woman with a cruel face and naked breasts opened to them, staring at their great size and their beards, and showed them up a long stair to a room with a bed, from which Emmanuel looked up at them.

“It was a small room, tucked close under the roof, and held but the tumbled frowsy bed, an uneasy table and a chair. On the floor, clothes and boots lay heaped with old newspapers, and the place was hot with stale air. From the pillows, the face of Emmanuel met them with something of expectancy; and the two big men, fresh from the wind of the veld, saw with a quick dismay how his pale skin stood tight

THE HOME KRAAL

over the bones of him, and a clear pink burned like a danger lamp high up on each cheek.

“‘I thought you would come,’ said the sick man in a weak voice, ‘I knew it. I was sure I should not die alone in this hole, while my mother’s horses were sound. It is bad enough to die at all, but no man deserves to die away from home.’

“Peter kneeled down beside the bed and would have passed an arm under his shoulder. But he would not have it.

“‘No need to slobber,’ he said, with a note of contempt in the voice that rang so faintly. The woman, who was leaning in the door, laughed harshly, and a passing smile flickered over Emmanuel’s face.

“‘I couldn’t live, could I, Flo?’ he said to her. ‘But I can die. You watch—it’ll be worth seeing. What’s that you have at your belt, Barend? Not money?’

“Barend nodded. ‘Yes, it is money,’ he said. ‘The ou ma sent it, if you should need it.’

“‘Need it!’ Emmanuel laughed harshly.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

'God, but I do need it. When didn't I? How much is it, man?'

"'She would not have us stay to count it,' answered Barend. 'But it is a very great sum.' He loosened the bag from his belt. 'All gold,' he added, and poured the sovereigns in a heap on the tumbled bed.

"'God!' said Emmanuel again, striving to sit up. The woman at the door uttered a short oath and came forward with parted lips and bent over the gold.

"'Laddie, it's a pile,' she said hoarsely. 'A jugfull!' Her twitching hands ploughed through the heap, and the coins tinkled among her fingers. She was glancing from one to another of the men, and drew forth her hand clenched on a full fist of sovereigns. Peter, still kneeling beside the bed, made a noise in his throat.

"She bent her look on him, a look of narrow warlike eyes and bared teeth, the first stare of a savage animal disturbed on its kill; but the big Boer met her with a face of calm.

THE HOME KRAAL

“ ‘The ou ma sent it for Emmanuel,’ he said slowly, and rose to his feet.

“She snarled at him, but Barend, with his teeth clenched on his beard, moved to the door and stood there with his legs apart and his great hands on his hips, filling up the way. Emmanuel lay on his back, breathing a little hard, the color pulsing in and out on his cheeks and a twisted smile on his lips. She turned a second to him, as though to appeal, but saw him as he lay and said nothing.

“ ‘Put that money, Emmanuel’s money, back on the bed !’ said Peter.

“She lifted it to her bosom as though to pouch it, but Peter moved his arm and she flung the coins suddenly on the floor, and laughed gratingly at him.

“ ‘D’you see that, laddie?’ she called to Emmanuel. ‘Oh, you sneering devil, gasping there, ain’t you got a word to say to me? Say, can’t I have some of this cash? There’s enough here to spare me a fistfull.’

“ ‘Lift me up, Peter,’ said Emmanuel. Peter

TALES FROM THE VELDT

raised him till he sat upright, and held him with a long arm about his shoulders. Emmanuel reached forward hands thin as films of milk, and shuffled the gold to and fro.

“‘Can you have some!’ he said, looking up at the woman. ‘You! Yes, you man-wrecking pirate, go down on your knees and whine for it, beg for it, pray with clasped hands for it, and you shall take as much as you can grasp. Do that, d’you hear? I want to see you on your knees for once and grovelling for a handful of sovereigns. Go on; get down with you!’

“Barend gave a short laugh. It was amusing of Emmanuel, he thought, to promise this on a condition so impossible. The woman spun on her heel and faced him sharply with bent brows and a heaving bosom.

“‘Kneel, my beauty,’ said Emmanuel again mockingly, but watching the woman as she stared at Barend. There was a kind of wonder on her dark cruel face as she studied the big Boer’s serene countenance and masterful poise of head, and noted there the mild amusement which is the scorn of a good man.

THE HOME KRAAL

“‘Kneel now, and plead for it,’ said Emmanuel again; and of a sudden a doubt came over Barend. There was a distress plain to see, something remorseful and newly born surging in this harlot; there was an appeal, fiercely shameful, in the hard eyes bent on his.

“Of a sudden she wheeled round and spat an awful curse at the sick man. ‘Keep your damned money!’ she went on, while the thick veins in her neck grew to dark ridges. ‘D’you think you can buy everything? You’ve sold your life and your innocence for filth—d’you suppose it’s all to buy? You an’ me’s in the same box, my boy—bad ’uns both, but you don’t make a dog of me.’

“She turned to Barend. ‘Let me pass, you big hulking ——’ she hesitated, looking at him.

“‘Oh, you poor innocent,’ she cried, with a laugh, and ran past him and out at the door.

“Emmanuel called after her, and bade her come back and take what she would, but her heels rattled on the stairway and she was gone.

“‘Is that the strange woman?’ asked Peter, quoting from the Proverbs.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“Emmanuel laughed. ‘Strange as the devil,’ he said, with his voice running weak. ‘You see souls in this town, cousins—not bodies only, as on the farm. Souls that blush and bleed, I tell you. But go to the head of the stairway, Barend, and shout as loud as you can for Jim. Just shout “Jim”!’

“Barend went and roared the name half a dozen times. There came at last a man with a dirty coat buttoned to the neck, grimy, ill-shod and white-eyed, and to him Emmanuel, speaking from behind the heap of sovereigns, to which the man’s evil pale eyes strayed every moment, gave orders.

“‘Tell the boys,’ he said, ‘that there’s a spree here to-night. Get the whole gang, Jim, and particularly Walters. And take what money you want, and send what is necessary up here. Steal what you must, you hound, but leave us short of nothing, or my big cousins here will cut you to ribbons. Is that not so, Barend?’

“‘Whenever you please, Emmanuel,’ said Barend.

“The man Jim took the money and went, and

THE HOME KRAAL

Emmanuel lay in Peter's arm, picking at the gold.

" 'Shall I count it for you?' said Peter at last.

" 'God, no!' said Emmanuel. 'Leave it, man. It's luxury not to know how much it is.' A dribble of coins tinkled from the blanket to the floor. 'Don't pick them up,' he cried, as Barend stooped. 'This is like water in a long trek to me.' He picked up a handful of money and strewed it abroad. 'I can die,' he said, 'now I've money to throw away, and to-night there'll be the end.'

"It was an orgy that evening. There came men and women to that high room, where the evil man Jim had already disposed of bottles of spirits and of wine. The big Boers stood there like trees among poppies. 'Tis an evil, leering flower, the poppy, with its color of blood and love mounted on its throat of death. Barend and Peter, upright and still, stood at the head of the bed watching them as they entered, lean, cruel-mouthed dogs of the city, whose eyes went to the gold on the blanket ere they greeted

TALES FROM THE VELDT

the man that had bidden them thither. Emmanuel, propped in his pillows, his face a mask of hard mastery, his eyes like blurs of fire on a burned stick, looked at them as they came in, yet ever his eyes returned to the door, as though he sought some one who should yet come.

“Women spoke to him—handsome bold women with free lips, and eyes that commanded eyes of men, and these he barely answered. But a crisp step on the stairs brought the death-spot hot and quick to his fevered cheeks, and there entered a man.

“A small man, a dark man ! Barend, talking afterwards, with a pucker of wonder between his brows, said he was *smooth*. He had a face that was keen and alert without being hard ; eyes that were quiet and yet judged ; lips upon which there dwelt an armed peace and also a humorous curve. He seemed to have his own world, to blot from his consciousness that which displeased him ; yet he himself was for those who looked upon him a man blocking the horizon of life. A great man, I judge—that is, a man great in the qualities which need but an

THE HOME KRAAL

aim to move mountains. God gives few such men an aim, or there would be more gods.

“Emmanuel spoke very quietly to him, but with no wheeze of weakness in his voice. ‘Good-evening, Walters,’ he said.

“The newcomer but cast a glance over his shoulder. ‘Ah!’ he said, and his eye lighted on the gold, and his pleasant lip curled further. ‘Has your mother died?’ he asked. ‘I suppose that’s why you’re so gay. What a funny little beast you are, Van der Westhuizen!’

“‘These are my cousins,’ said Emmanuel. ‘They ought to suit you. They are as stupid as honest men, and as honest as stupid ones. This is Barend—that is Peter!’

“Walters looked up at them, and Peter held out a hand to him. He took it, and smiled, and when Barend saw the grace and friendship of that smile, he too gave his hand.

“‘You have come to take Emmanuel home?’ said Walters. ‘Well, use him tenderly. If he is worth handling at all he is to be tenderly handled. But I am sure you will be gentle. You are too big to be rough.’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“ He turned from them to a woman that was prattling near by, and at once entered her life, it seemed. She turned to him as one who worships.

“ ‘Come, drink!’ Emmanuel called to them. ‘This is my farewell, you people. I’ve come to the jump-off place. Reach me a glass, somebody, and put something in it. What will you have, Walters? Help yourselves, all of you.’

“ With chattering and laughter the bottles passed about, and a woman at the foot of the bed raised her glass with a flourish and drank to the sick man. ‘You’re game, boy,’ she cried; ‘you finish like a ferret!’

“ Barend stood for three hours watching them, Peter by his side. ‘It was like reading in Chronicles and Kings,’ he said, when he related it later. ‘There was a boil of business all about, and drinking and gabbling, and I saw faces, flushed and working, that I am sick to remember. The wine they drank came soon to possess them as Legion possessed the swine; in an hour they were lost to all reason and decency, and women were cursing in the voices of

THE HOME KRAAL

men and men weeping loosely like women. They cast off their outer garments when the room grew hot, and lounged half-naked; and of all of them, only two seemed to live aloof, like men among beasts—Emmanuel and the young man Walters.

“ ‘ This young man passed in and out like an eel in water. Nothing clung to him of all the filth in which he trod. He drank, but was not less the master of himself; he jested, but his laughter was the mirth of the pure in heart, without harshness in it, and they made him way and listened when he spoke; and even the gross, hot-eyed women dulled their terrible speech when he stood before them. The eyes of Emmanuel, propped in his bed, his blankets wet with the wine he spilled from his glass, were ever upon him. I think the boy admired him. Whenever he stirred, sovereigns dribbled to the floor, but he looked not once after them; he was all for watching Walters, who barely turned towards him. Ah, but he was very sick, our Emmanuel! His breath rasped as he drew it; there was a fire in his great eyes that made

TALES FROM THE VELDT

one tremble—that fire that makes you think of hell-fire and naked souls writhing in it. A look of savage hunger, but far off, as though desiring things not of earth !’

“A strange scene, was it not, for a chamber overshadowed by the wings of death. Towards midnight, Emmanuel sighed, and slipped down a little. Peter moved to lift him and started at the pinch of death on his face. His exclamation drew most of the others to look, but as they crowded near Emmanuel opened his eyes.

“‘Walters,’ he said faintly.

“‘Well, my boy,’ said Walters.

“‘What—do—you—think—of—this?’ Emmanuel asked, his weakness watering his speech.

“Walters laughed quietly. ‘I’ll tell you in the morning,’ he said. ‘But you’re a good actor, my friend.’

“‘You’ll see,’ whispered Emmanuel, and closed his eyes again.

“Then Barend bade them all go forth, and after awhile, when he had taken one lewd man in his hands and cast him on the stair, they

THE HOME KRAAL

went, and the noise of their voices, raw and ungentle, filtered away. The two Boers were left at the bedside, among the bottles and the gold and the strewn clothes; and Emmanuel lay rigid, with a buzz in his throat and a spot of blood on his lips. Peter kneeled and prayed.

“But in a couple of hours, when his face had grown thin and his nose sharp, and his hands cold as clods, they saw he was dead, and spoke together of what they must do. They knew nothing of that treacherous web of law and custom which is the life of a city; they knew only that their feet were among pitfalls, and that they must move quickly if they would take Emmanuel away to the farm and the kraal. So while Peter went forth to bring three horses, Barend sought among the garments scattered about the room and dressed the thin body in them, and put his own broad-brimmed hat on the fair head that should henceforth need no shelter from the sun. When he had done, Peter returned, and came up the stairs quietly.

“They took the body of Emmanuel under the armpits, one on each side of him, and thus

TALES FROM THE VELDT

carried him down the stairs. A man met them on the way, his face bland and foolish in the glow of a candle he carried.

“‘Drunk, eh?’ he said, without particular curiosity. ‘Almost dead, by the looks of him.’

“‘Quite dead,’ answered Barend, and they passed him and came down to the horses, hitched at the sidewalk.

“They put the body in the saddle, and rode on either side, close in, and Peter held it upright with a hand on its shoulder, as a man might conceivably ride by a comrade. There was yet no light of day, only a grayness that streaked the night sky, and a bitterness in the air like a note of mourning. Slowly, walking their sleepy horses, they passed along the streets, dark save where a lamp at a corner shed a yellow and dismal light about it. Creatures of the night, slouching here and there, looked at them ; policemen, screening from the wind in dark corners, thrust forth heads ; but they rode on, and none stopped them, and thus they came forth of the city and faced the veldt again.

THE HOME KRAAL

“They raised their faces to its freshness, familiar and friendly as the voice of one’s kin, and pushed the horses to a trot, while behind them the blur of light that was the city paled and died down as the miles multiplied under their hoofs. Peter had the leading rein of the middle horse while Barend steadied its burden, and thus they travelled towards the east and home.

“When the sun was high, they no longer dared follow the road. Out of those they must meet and exchange words with, there would surely be some whom they could not deceive—some who had seen death before and knew the signs of it. So they pulled aside, and made for the high land of Baviaan’s Nek, riding across the gray grass and among the yellow ant-hills till close on noon. Then, dipping to a hollow, where some willows cast a shade upon a pool of a spruit, they dismounted and laid the dead man in the cool, while they off-saddled the horses and rested themselves. There were biltong and bread in their saddle-bags, and tobacco they did not lack, and the need for

TALES FROM THE VELDT

food drove them to make a big meal. They were concerned with this so deeply that they did not notice that a Kafir, carrying the bundles which Kafirs always carry on the trek, had come up to them.

“He was an old Kafir, his wool gray and his skin rough with age, but his eyes were bright with the full of strength and peaceful with wisdom. He lay down at the pool’s brink and drank, and then gave them good day.

“‘Will the baas permit me to sit in the shade of the trees?’ he asked. ‘It is hot travelling.’

“He looked from them to the stretched body of Emmanuel as he spoke.

“‘Sit over there, then,’ said Barend, ‘and see you keep quiet.’

“‘Oh, I shall not wake that baas, at all events,’ said the old Kafir, pointing to the body.

“Both the Boers were startled at this, but the man walked calmly to the farthest tree, and piled his bundles there.

“‘We all have our troubles,’ he said, as he

THE HOME KRAAL

shook out his brown blanket. 'Age for some of us, sorrow for others. And then there is death, too. I am not dead, at least.'

"'Why do you talk of death?' demanded Peter sharply.

"The old Kafir held up a finger. There was a kind of mirth in his motion. 'Hush, or you will wake him,' he replied. 'But I know all about death, except the taste of it. I know how it looks, and how it lies on the ground, and how it comes, and how it is concealed.'

"He raised his hard old face with eyes half-closed, and snuffled at the air.

"'And how it smells, too,' he said.

"'You will learn the taste of it in a minute,' cried Barend, springing to his feet with a white face. 'You old scarecrow, what is it you are hinting about? Do you take us for murderers?'

"The old Kafir sat down among his bundles and fumbled for his pipe. There was no concern on him; he had the still ease of one who comes upon his own special task, sees it, and knows he is the master of it. While Barend,

TALES FROM THE VELDT

shaking a little, stood gauntly over him, he filled his pipe, lit it, and blew forth a cloud of smoke.

“‘Pooh!’ he said. ‘The baas gives too much importance to trifles. A dead man is of less worth than a living one. It is the baas I am interested in—not the carrion.’

“He spat very leisurely and took the pipe to his lips again.

“Barend, after a little hesitation, sat down again.

“‘I have known white men,’ said the old Kafir, leaning back against his tree, ‘who scratched crosses in the ground, and traced them on their breasts with a finger, when they came upon death or the dead. That is a strong charm. And in the east, yonder, are others who spill wine on the earth. But in my tribe we neither make crosses nor waste liquor. We spit. Where is the baas going?’

“‘Across Baviaan’s Nek,’ said Barend, very quietly.

“‘Ah! That is a long way. To-night the baas should camp by the huts that are over the

THE HOME KRAAL

drift where the great rocks are. There are Kafirs there who will not fear this luggage of yours. They will sell food and shelter, and refrain from curiosity. Will that serve the baas?’

“‘Surely,’ said Barend, and tossed him some tobacco.

“The old Kafir caught the horses for them and helped them to lift the dead man to the saddle. By this time the body had become stiff, and needed a constant effort to hold it steady. The sun was hot as they rode on, and the dust smoked up about the fetlocks of the horses. The stiff feet of the dead man were in the stirrups, and as now and again they broke into a short canter, he seemed as though he would stand up in his stirrups to look ahead.

“‘So Emmanuel always did when he rode among ant-heaps,’ said Peter once.

“Barend only grunted in reply ; the strain on his arm and wrist was a heavy one.

“They camped that night at the huts the old Kafir had spoken of. The Kafirs there were of a large build, strong and silent. They glanced once or twice at the body, but said nothing.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

Food was forthcoming, and a big clean hut, and here the two Boers slept beside the corpse. It was only next morning, when they had mounted and were about to start, that one, with the head-ring of dignity about his scalp, gave a word of counsel.

"He stood at Barend's bridle, looking up to him with a sort of pity.

"‘The day will be hot, baas,’ he said, ‘and *that* will be doubly burdensome. So you may know that beyond the Nek, where the mimosas grow on a damp plain, the ground is very soft. There are huts there, and shovels.’

"Barend nodded his thanks, and they rode through the drift and up the Nek. It was, as the Kafir had predicted, a hot day. One of those days which come in the throng of the summer, when the sun is an oppressor, ruthless and joying in pain, when the earth is dead with heat and dryness and the very air forbears to take a freedom! When they came down the slopes beyond the crest, the flanks and rumps of the horses were slimy with running sweat, and red nostrils spoke of distress. The dead

THE HOME KRAAL

man sat in the saddle with a thin show of eyeball under each lowered lid, and a gleam of teeth above the sunken lower lip, yet for all the world like one that follows a purpose, like one guiding himself to a steadfast end. In the face there was a growing hue that does not visit the living, but the hat-brim cast a shadow over it that lent it an effect of deep gravity and solemn intention.

“ ‘He means to reach the farm,’ said Barend, after glancing at him.

“Peter drew rein. ‘And yet,’ he said, ‘he will never do it if we travel thus. We killed horses to make the city in three days; going at this rate, it will take us six to return.’

“ ‘Well,’ replied Barend, ‘what else is there to do?’

“ ‘Only one thing,’ said Peter, ‘your horse is the weight-carrier. You must take Emmanuel over your saddle-bow, and we must kill more horses.’

“ ‘But a dead man,’ said Barend. ‘It is like a blasphemy.’

“ ‘We can do nothing else,’ said Peter, and af-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

ter a little more talking they made the change."

The Vrouw Grobelaar paused and looked at us. Katje was tight in the crook of my arm.

"Words limp while horses stride free," she said, "but conceive that ride. Taking horses where they could find them, they rested no more, nor drew rein save to fill and light their pipes. From Baviaan's Nek they travelled at the canter across the mimosa swamp, and so by the Rhenoster Drift to Ookiep, where Barend's horse fell and he and that other rolled on the veld together. When Peter had found and brought another horse, they made one stage to Jantje's Kraal, and thence, galloping wordless through the night, to Zwartvark. Long rides, you will say! Aye, rides to remember; but think of the brimming stillness of the journey, hushed and governed by that silent companion, while thought could not stray nor fancy escape from the death that chased at the elbow of each. When, on the third morning, as the sun came spouting up from the low country, they saw afar the roof that was their goal, Peter

THE HOME KRAAL

cried aloud like a child awaking from evil dreams.

"Ere noon their hoofs knocked on the stones in the front kraal, and they bore the body to the shade of the tobacco shed.

"'And now,' said Peter, when that was done, 'who is to tell the ou tante?'

"Barend leaned at the door-post with his arm cast up over his face and said nought, but there came from the house a girl of the neighborhood, who laid a finger to her lips.

"'Hush,' she said. 'Make no noise about this house. Where have you been, the two of you? An hour earlier, and you had been in time. As it is, the Vrouw van der Westhuizen died with no kin about her.'"

THE SACRIFICE

I DO not think," said the Vrouw Grobelaar, looking at me with a hard unwinking eye, "that idle men should have pretty wives. Though Katje will lose that poppy red-and-white when she begins to grow fat. Still ——"

Katje made an observation.

"Her mother," pursued the Vrouw Grobelaar, still holding me fixed, "spent seventeen years in one room, because she could not go through the door; and when she died they took the roof off and hoisted her out like a bullock from a well. But as I was saying, it is not well that idle men—those with leisure for their littlenesses, like schoolmasters and doctors and Predikants—should have pretty wives, or they tend to waste themselves. A man with real work and money matters and the governing of cattle and land and Kafirs to fill his day, for such a one it is very well. Her prettiness is an interval, like the drink he takes in the noonday. But for an

THE SACRIFICE

idle man it becomes the air he breathes. He is all-dependent on it, and it is a small and breakable thing.

“Look how men have been wrecked upon a morsel of pink-and-white, how strong brains have scattered like seed from a burst pod for a trifle of hunger in a pair of eyes! I remember many such cases which would make you stare for the foolishness of men and the worthlessness of some women. There was the Heer Mostert, Predikant at Dopfontein, who fell to blasphemy and witchcraft when his wife Paula was sick and muttered emptily among her pillows.”

The old lady shifted in her wide chair and took her eyes from me at last.

“She was pretty, if you like,” she said. “A tall girl, with a small red mouth, and hair that swathed her head like coils of bronze. The Predikant, who had more fire in him than a minister should have, and more fullness of blood than is good for any man, spent the half of his life in the joy of being near to her. She was full in the face and slow with a sleek languor, but on his coming there was to see a quickness

TALES FROM THE VELDT

of welcome spread itself in her. She would flush warmly, and her eyes would cry to him. Their love glowed between them; they were children together in that mighty bond. So when a spring that came down with chill rains smote Paula with a fever, and laid her weakly on her bed, the Predikant was a widower already, and walked with a face white and hard, drawn suddenly into new lines of pain and fear.

“Women are strange in sickness. Some are infants, greatly needing caresses and the neighborhood of one tender and familiar. Others grow bitter, with an unwonted spite and temper, venting their ill-ease on all about them. But after the first, Paula was neither of these. The sense of things left her, and she lay on her bed with wide eyes that saw nothing and spoke brokenly about babies. For she had none. The doctor, a man of much brisk kindness, whose face was grown to a cheerful shape, frowned as he bent above her and questioned her heart and pulse. Paula was very ill, and as he looked up he saw the Predikant, tall and still, standing at the foot of the bed, gazing on the

THE SACRIFICE

girl's face that gave no gaze back ; and there was little he could say.

“ ‘Speak to her,’ he told him.

“The Predikant kneeled down beside her, and took her hand, that pinched and plucked upon the quilt, into his.

“ ‘Paula !’ he said gently. ‘Wife !’ and oh ! the yearning that shivered nakedly in his voice.

“ ‘Little hands,’ moaned Paula weakly—‘little hands beating on my breasts. Little weak hands ; oh, so little and weak !’

“The Predikant bowed his head, and the doctor saw his shoulders bunch in a spasm of grief.

“ ‘Paula !’ he called again. ‘Paula, dear. It is I—John. Don’t you know John, Paula ? Won’t you answer me, dear ?’

“With eyes shut tight, he lifted a face of passionate prayer.

“ ‘Say daddy !’ said Paula, crooning faintly. ‘Say daddy.’

“The doctor passed his arm across the Predikant.

“ ‘Come away,’ he said gently. ‘This does

TALES FROM THE VELDT

no good. Come away, now. There is plenty of hope.'

"He led him outside, rocking like a sightless man. When he sat down on the edge of the stoop, he stared straight before him for a little while, fingering a button on his coat till it broke off. Then he flung it from him and laughed—laughed a long quiet laugh that had no tincture of wildness.

"'Look here,' said the doctor, 'unless you go and lie down, you'll not be fit to help me with Paula when I need you. Lie down or work, whichever you please. But one or the other, my man.'

"'Suppose,' said the Predikant quietly—'suppose I go and pray?'

"'That'll do capitally,' answered the doctor. 'But pray hard, mind. It might even do some good. There's nothing certain in these cases.'

"'I have just been thinking that,' said the Predikant, turning to him with a face full of doubt. 'But we can try everything, at any rate.'

"'We will, too,' said the doctor cheerfully ;

THE SACRIFICE

and then the Predikant passed to his room to pour out the soul that was in him in prayer for the life of Paula.

“It was a great battle the doctor fought in the dark room in which she lay. When late that night the Predikant, his face dull white in the ominous gloom, came again to the rail at the foot of the bed, his hand fell on something soft that hung there. It was Paula’s long bronze hair they had cut off for coolness to her head.

“The doctor did not wait for the question.

“‘There will be a crisis before day,’ he said.

“‘What does that mean?’ asked the other. The doctor explained that Paula would rise, as it were, to the crest of a steep hill, whence she would go down to life or death as God should please.

“‘But what can we do?’ demanded the Predikant.

“‘Very little,’ replied the doctor. ‘Beyond the care I am giving her now, the thing is out of our hands. We can only look on and hope. There is always hope.’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“ ‘And always hope betrayed,’ said the Predikant. ‘But is she worse now than she was this afternoon when she babbled of the little hands?’

“ ‘Yes,’ answered the doctor.

“ ‘But I prayed,’ said the Predikant, with a faint note of argument and question.

“ ‘Quite right, too,’ replied the doctor. ‘Go and pray again,’ he suggested.

“The Predikant shook his head. ‘It is wasting time,’ he whispered, and turned to tiptoe out. But at the door he turned and crept back again.

“ ‘It is my wife, you see,’ he said mildly— ‘my wife, so if one thing fails we must try another. You see?’

“The doctor nodded soothingly, and the Predikant crept out again.

“The doctor sat beside the bed and watched the sick woman, and heard her weak murmur of children born in the dreams of fever. It was a still night, cool, and hung with a white glory of stars, and the point at which life and death should meet and choose drew quickly near.

THE SACRIFICE

There was this and that to do, small offices that a woman should serve; but the doctor had ordered the women away and did them himself. He was a large man, who continually fell off when he mounted a horse, but in a sick-room he was extraordinarily deft, and trod velvet-footed. So in the business of leading Paula to the point where God would relieve him time went fast, and presently he knew the minute was at hand.

“He was sitting, intent and strung, when he heard from the garden outside the house a bell tinkle lightly. He frowned, for it was no time for noises; but it tinkled again and yet again, louder and more insistent, while a change grew visibly on the face of the sick woman, and he knew that the issue was stirring in the womb of circumstance. Then, brazenly, the bell rang out, and with an oath on his breath he rose and slipped soundlessly from the room.

“When he reached the garden all was still, and he loosed his malediction upon the night air. But even as he turned to go back the bell fluttered near at hand, and he dived among the

TALES FROM THE VELDT

bushes to silence it. He nearly fell over one that kneeled between two big shrubs and wagged a little ram bell.

“‘What in hell is this?’ demanded the doctor fiercely, seizing the bell.

“‘It is me,’ answered a voice, and the Predikant rose to his feet. ‘Be careful where you tread. There are things lying about your feet you had better not touch. Has it done her any good?’

“‘You stricken fool!’ cried the doctor, ‘do you know no better than to go rattling your blasted bells about the place to-night? You’re mad, my man—mad and inconvenient.’

“‘But is she better?’ persisted the Predikant.

“‘I’ll tell you in ten minutes,’ replied the doctor. ‘But if you make any more noise you’ll kill her, mind that.’

“The Predikant went with him to the stoop, and stayed there while the doctor returned to the bedside. At the end of an interval he was out again, and took the husband by the arm.

“‘It’s over,’ he said. ‘She’s doing finely.

THE SACRIFICE

Sleeping like a child. You can thank God now, Mynheer Mostert.'

"The Predikant stared at him dumbly.

" 'Thank God, did you say?' he asked at last.

" 'And me,' answered the doctor, smiling.

" 'I do thank you,' answered the Predikant. 'I do thank you from my heart, doctor. But for the rest——'

"And here, with a voice as even as one who speaks on the traffic of every day, with a calm face, he poured forth an awful, a soul-wracking blasphemy.

" 'Here!' cried the doctor, startled. 'Draw the line somewhere, Predikant. That sort of thing won't do at all, you know.'

" 'Now let me see my wife,' said the Predikant; and after a while, when he had warned him very solemnly on the need for silence, the doctor took him in and showed him Paula, thin and shorn, sleeping with level breath. The Predikant looked on her with parted lips and clenched hands, and when he was outside again he turned to the doctor.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘I value my soul,’ he said simply. ‘But it is worth it.’

“‘I haven’t a notion what you are gibbering about,’ answered the doctor, who had a glass in his hand. ‘But there’s long sleep and a dream-killer in this tumbler, and you’ve to drink it.’

“‘I need nothing,’ said the Predikant, but at the doctor’s urgency he drank the dose, and was soon in his bed and sleeping.

“Next day, when he was let in to Paula’s bedside, she smiled and murmured at him, and nodded weakly when he spoke. The doctor warned him about noise.

“‘We’ve won her back,’ he explained, ‘and she’s going to do well. But she has had a hard time, and there’s no denying she is very weak and ill. So if you go back to your bell-ringing or any of those games you’ll undo everything. She’s to be kept quiet, do you hear?’

“‘I hear,’ answered the Predikant. ‘There shall be stillness. Not that it matters for all your words, but there shall be stillness.’

“‘I warn you,’ retorted the doctor seriously, ‘that it matters very much. You’re off your

THE SACRIFICE

axle, my friend, and I shall have to doctor you. But if I hear of any foolishness, Predikant or no Predikant, I'll have you locked up as sure as your name's Mostert.'

"He left him there, and started through the garden to his cart that stood in the road. On his way he stubbed his foot against something that lay on the earth—a great metal cup. He picked it up.

"'I am not a heathen,' he said, as he brought it to the Predikant, 'and therefore a Communion-cup is no more to me than a sardine-tin, when it is out of its place. I don't want to know what you were doing out here the other night, my friend; but you had better put this back in the Kerk before somebody misses it.'

"The Predikant took it from him, but said nothing.

"'And look here,' went on the doctor, 'it was my skill and knowledge that saved your wife. Nothing else. Good-day.'

"As he drove off, he saw the Predikant still standing on the stoop, the great cup, stained here and there with earth, in his hand.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"From that hour Paula mended swiftly. Even the doctor was surprised at the manner in which health sped back to her, and the young roses returned to her cheeks.

"‘There’s more than medicine in this,’ he said one day. ‘Do you know what it is, Predikant?’

"‘Yes,’ said the Predikant.

"‘You do, eh? Well, it’s clean young blood, my friend, and nothing else,’ answered the doctor, watching him with a slight frown of shrewdness.

"The Predikant said nothing. For days there had been a kind of gloom on him, lit by a savage satisfaction in the betterment of his wife. His manner was like a midnight, in which a veld-fire glows far off. He had grown thinner, and his face was lean and gray, while in his eyes smouldered a spark that had no relation to joy or triumph.

"‘Clean young blood,’ repeated the doctor. ‘No miracles, if you please.’ He thought, you see, he had divined the Predikant’s secret.

THE SACRIFICE

‘I’m a man of science,’ he went on, ‘and when I come across a miracle I’ll shut up shop.’

“Paula, from her pillows, heard them with a little wonder, and she was not slow to see the trouble and change in her husband’s haunted face. So that night, when he came to say good-night to her, she drew his hand down to her breast, and searched for the seed of his woe.

“‘You look so thin and ill, my dear,’ she said gently. ‘You have worried too much over me. You have paid too great a price for your wife.’

“She felt him tremble between her arms.

“‘A great one,’ he answered, ‘but not too great.’

“‘Not?’ she smiled restfully, as he lifted his face from her bosom and looked into her eyes.

“‘Never too great a price for you,’ he said. ‘Never that.’

“‘My love!’ she answered, and for a while they were silent together.

“Then she stirred. ‘Do you know, John,’ she said, ‘that you and I have not prayed to-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

gether since first this sickness took me? Shall we thank God together, now that He has willed to leave us our companionship for yet a space?’

“‘No!’ he said quietly.

“‘Dear!’ She was surprised. ‘I was asking you to thank God with me.’

“He nodded. ‘I heard you, but it serves no purpose. God forgot us, Paula.’

“His eyes were like coals gleaming hotly. ‘I prayed,’ he cried, ‘and yet you slipped farther from me and nearer the grave. I strewed my soul in supplication, and there was talk of winding-sheets. And then, in the keen hour of decision, when you tilted in the balance, I sought elsewhere for aid; and while I defiled all holiness, ere yet I had finished the business, comes to me that doctor and tells me all is well. What think you of that, Paula?’

“She had heard him with no breaking of the little smile that lay on her lips—the little all-forgiving smile that is the heritage of mothers,—and now that he was done she smiled still.

“‘I remember the old tales,’ she answered.

THE SACRIFICE

‘How does the witch call the devil, John? Water in the Communion-cup, bread and blood and earth—is that it? and two circles—two, is it?’

“‘Three,’ he corrected.

“‘Ah, yes; three.’ She laughed soothingly. ‘You poor muddled boy,’ she murmured. ‘Do you prize me so much, John? Poor John. You must let me be wise for both of us, John. I am not afraid of the devil, at all events.’

“‘Nor I,’ he answered, ‘so long as you are well.’

“‘But I am getting well now,’ she answered. ‘And I do want you to pray with me, dear. Put your head down, dear, and let me whisper to you.’

“She soothed him gently and sweetly, but-tressing his weakness with her love. How can I know what she said or what he answered? She wrought upon him with the kind arts God gives a woman to pay her for being a woman, and soon she had softened something of the miserable madness that possessed him, and he kneeled beside the bed, sobbing rendingly, and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

prayed. Her hand lay on his head, and after a while, when the violence had passed by, he was taken with a serene peace.

"He bade her good-night, tenderly.

"‘Good-night,’ she answered, ‘and, John—I would that I could give you half of what you would have given for me.’

"As he went out at the door he saw her face smiling at him, with a great warmth of love and pity transfiguring it.

"Next morning, when the doctor came, he stayed near an hour in her room, and then came to the Predikant.

"‘Just tell me,’ he said to him,—‘just tell me straight and short, what you did to your wife last night.’

"The Predikant told him in a few words what had passed between them, while the doctor watched him and curled his lip.

"‘Exactly,’ he said, when the Predikant had done. ‘Quite what I should have guarded against in you. Now you may go to your wife as quickly as you like. She is dying!’

"It was so. She died in his arms in half an

THE SACRIFICE

hour, with the little smile of baffled motherhood yet on her lips."

Katje clenched her hands and looked out to the veld in silence.

THE COWARD

“**A**FTER all,” said the Vrouw Grobelaar weightily, “a coward is but one with keener eyes than his fellows. No young man fears a ghost till it is dark, but the coward sees the stars in the daytime, like a man at the bottom of a well, and ghosts walk all about him.

“A coward should always be a married man,” she added. “You may say, Katje, that it is hard on the woman. It is what I would expect of you. But when you have experience of wifehood you will come to the knowledge that it is the man’s character which counts, and it is the woman’s part to make up his deficiencies. With what men learn by practising on their wives, the world has been made.

“If you would cease to cackle in that silly fashion I would tell you of Andreas van Wyck, the coward—a tale that is known to few. Well, then!

THE COWARD

"He was a bushveld Boer, farming cattle on good land, not a day's ride from the Tiger River. His wife, Anna, was of the de Villiers stock from over the borders of the Free State, a commandant's daughter, and the youngest of fourteen children. They were both people of a type common enough. Andreas was to all seeming just such a Burgher as a hundred others who have grown rich quietly, never heard of outside their own districts, yet as worthy as others whom every one nods to at Nachemaal. Anna, too, was of an every-day pattern, a short plump woman, with a rosy solemn face and pleasant eyes—a sound Boer woman, who could carry out her saddle, catch her horse and mount him without help. You see, in her big family, the elders were all men, and most had seen service against the Kafirs, and a girl there won esteem not by fallals and little tripping graces, but by usefulness and courage and good fellowship. She saw Andreas first when he was visiting his mother's aunt in her neighborhood. There was shooting at a target, for a prize of an English saddle, and no one has ever said of him

TALES FROM THE VELDT

that he was not a wonderful shot. He carried off the prize easily, against all the Boers of those parts, and Anna's father and brothers among them. A few months later they were married.

"They drove from Anna's home to Andreas' farm on the bushveld in a Cape cart with two horses, and sat close under the hood while the veld about them was lashed with the first rains of December. It was no time for a journey by road, but in those days the country was not checkered with railway lines as it is now, and Anna had nothing to say against a trifle of hardship. For miles about them the rolling country of the Free State was veiled with a haze of rain, and the wind drove it in sheets here and there, till the horses staggered against it, and the drum of the storm on the hood of the cart was awesome and mournful. Towards afternoon, after a long, slow trek, they came down the slope towards Buys' Drift, and Andreas pulled his horses up at the edge of the water.

"The rains had swelled the river to a flood,

THE COWARD

and it ran with barely a ripple where ordinarily the bushes were clear of the water. Full a hundred and fifty yards it spanned, and as they looked, they saw it carry past a dead ox and the rags of uprooted huts.

“‘We can never cross till it goes down,’ said Andreas. ‘I am sorry for it, but there is no choice. We must go back to your father’s house.’

“Anna pressed his arm and smiled.

“‘You are joking,’ she said. ‘You know well that I will not go back there to-night for all the floods in ten years. No girl would that valued her husband and herself.’

“‘But look at the drift!’ he urged.

“‘It is a big head of water,’ she agreed. ‘I was once before upset in such a flood as this. You must head them up-stream a little, and then strike down again to the opposite bank.’

“‘Not I,’ he answered. ‘I am not going to drown myself for a trifle of pride, nor you either. We must go back.’

“She shook her head. ‘Not that!’ she replied. ‘Give me the reins and the whip.’ Be-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

fore he could resist she had taken them from his hands. 'Put your feet on our box,' she directed, 'or the water will float it away. Now then!'

"She drew the whip across the horses' quarters, and in a minute they were in the river, while Andreas sat marvelling.

"You understand that it was first necessary to move up-stream to a point in the middle of the river. She steadied the horses with a taut hold on the reins, for her young wrists were strong as iron, and spoke to them cheerily as the flood leaped against their chests, and they stood and hesitated. The rain drove in their faces viciously : Andreas, his face sheltered by the wide brim of his hat, had to rub away the water again and again in order to see ; but Anna knit her brows and endured the storm gallantly, while with whip and rein and voice she pushed the team on towards the place of turning.

"The rushing of the water filled their ears, and before them, between the high banks of the Vaal, they saw only a world of brown water,

THE COWARD

streaked with white froth, hurling down upon them. It rose above the foot-board and swilled to the level of the seat. The horses, with heads lifted high, were often, for an anxious moment or two, free of the shifting bottom and swimming. A tree, blundering down-stream, struck the near wheel, and they were nearly capsized, the water rushing in over their knees. As they tilted Andreas gave a cry, and shifted in his place. Anna called to her horses and knit her brows.

“At last it was time to humor them around, and this, as I need not tell you, is the risky business in crossing a flooded drift. With somewhat of a draw on the near rein, Anna checked the team, and then, prodding with her whip, headed the horses over and started them. They floundered and splashed, and Andreas half rose from his seat, with lips clenched on a cry. The traces tightened under the water, a horse stumbled and vanished for a moment, and, as the cart tilted sickeningly, the man, ashen-faced and strung, leaped from it and was whirled away.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"The water took him under, drew him gasping over the bottom, and spat him up again to swim desperately. His head was down-stream, and, as there was a sharp bend half a mile below, he had no extraordinary difficulty in bringing his carcass to shore. He lay for a minute among the bushes, and then ran back to see what had become of the cart, the horses, and his wife. He found them ashore, safe and waiting for him, and Anna wringing the wet from her hair as she stood beside the horses' heads.

"'You are not hurt?' she asked, before he could speak. Her face was grave and flushed, her voice very quiet and orderly.

"'No,' he said.

"'Ah!' she said, and climbed again into the cart, and made room for him in the place of the driver.

"That was how he discovered himself to his wife. In that one event of their wedding-day he revealed to Anna what was a secret from all the world—perhaps even from himself. He was a coward, the thing Anna had never known

THE COWARD

yet of any man—never thought enough upon to learn how little it may really matter or how greatly it may ruin a character. When her brothers, having drunk too much at a waapenschauw, wished to make a quarrel quickly, they called their man a coward. But for her it had been like saying he was a devil—a futile thing that was only offensive by reason of its intention. And now she was married to a coward, and must learn the ways of it.

“They spoke no more of the matter. Anna shrank from a reference to it. She could not find a word to fit the subject that did not seem an attack on the man with whom she must spend her life. They settled down to their business of living together very quietly, and I think the commandant’s daughter did no braver thing than when she recognized the void in her husband, and then, holding it loathsome and unforgivable, passed it over and put it from her mind out of mere loyalty to him.

“The years went past at their usual pace, and there occurred nothing to ear-mark any hour and make it memorable, till the Kafirs

TALES FROM THE VELDT

across the Tiger River rose. I do not remember what men said the rising was about. Probably their chief was wearied with peace and drunkenness and wanted change; but anyhow the commando that was called out to go and shoot the tribe into order included Andreas, the respected Burgher and famous shot. The feldkornet rode round and left the summons at his house, and he read it to Anna.

“‘Now I shall get some real shooting,’ he said, with bright eyes.

“She looked at him carefully, and noted that he lifted down his rifle with the gaiety of a boy who goes hunting. It brought a warmth to her heart that she dared not trust.

“‘It is a pity you should go before the calves are weaned,’ she said.

“‘Pooh! You can see to them,’ he answered.

“‘But you could so easily buy a substitute. It would even be cheaper to send a substitute,’ she urged half-heartedly.

“You see she had no faith at all in his courage. The years she had lived with him had brought forth nothing to undo the impression

THE COWARD

he had left in her mind when he sprang from the cart and abandoned her in the middle of the Vaal River, and this emergency had awakened all her old fear lest he should be proclaimed a coward before the men of his world.

“‘I dare say it would be cheaper and better in every way,’ he answered with some irritation. ‘But for all that I am going. This is a war, the first I have known, and I am not going to miss the chance. So you had better get my gear ready!’

“With that he commenced to tear up rags and to oil and clean his rifle.

“She bade him adieu next day and saw him canter off with some doubt. He had shown no hesitation at all in this matter. From the time of the coming of the summons he had been all eagerness and interest. It might have led another to think she had been wrong, that the man who feared water feared nothing else; but Anna knew well, from a hundred small signs, that her husband had no stability of valor in him, that he was and would remain—a coward.

“Next day the fighting had commenced, and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

Anna, working serenely about her house, soon had news of it. There was a promise of interest in this little war from the start. The commando, under Commandant Jan Wepener, had made a quick move and thrust forward to the crown of the little hills that overlook the Tiger River and the flat land beyond it, which was the home of the tribe. Here they made their laager, and it was plain that the fighting would consist either of descents by the Burghers on the kraals, or of attacks by the Kafirs upon the hills. Either way, there must be some close meetings and hardy hewing, a true and searching test for good men. The young Burgher that told her of it, sitting upon his horse at the door as though he were too hurried and too warlike to dismount and enter, rejoiced noisily at the prospect of coming to grips.

"Anna puckered her brows. 'It is not the way to fight,' she said doubtfully. 'A bush and a rifle and a range of six hundred yards is what beat the Basutos.'

"'Pooh!' laughed the young Burgher. 'You say that because your husband shoots so

THE COWARD

well, and you want him to be marked for good fighting.'

"She frowned a little, inwardly accusing herself of this same meaning. She would gladly have put these thoughts from her, for brave folk, whether men or women, have commonly but one face, and she hated to show friendship to her husband and harbor distrust of him in her bosom. When the young Burgher at last rode away, galloping uselessly to seem what he wished to be—a wild person of sudden habits—she sat on the stoop for a while and thought deeply. And she sighed, as though pondering brought her no decision, and went once more about her work, always with an eye cocked to the window to watch for any rider coming back from the laager with news of affairs.

"But there was a shyness on both sides for a week. The Kafirs had not yet ripened their minds to an attack on the hills, nor had the Burghers quite sloughed their custom of orderliness and respect for human life. There was a little shooting, mostly at the landscape, by those whose trigger-fingers itched; but at last a man

TALES FROM THE VELDT

coming back with a hole in his shoulder to be doctored and admired halted at the door and told of a fight.

“He sat in a long chair and told about the pain in his shoulder, and opened his shirt to show the wound. Anna leaned against the door-post and heard him. Outside his brown pony was rattling the rings of the bit and switching at flies, and she perceived the faint smell of the sweat-stained saddlery and the horse-odour she knew so well. Before her, the tall grimy man, with bandages looped about him, his pleasant face a little yellow from the loss of blood, babbled boastfully. It was a scene she was familiar with, for of old on the Free State border the Burghers and the Basutos were forever jostling one another, and—I told you her father was a commandant !

“‘But tell me about the battle,’ she urged.

“‘Allemachtag !’ exclaimed the wounded man. ‘But that was a fight ! It was night, you know, about an hour after the dying of the moon, and there was a spit of rain and some little wind. The commandant was very wake-

THE COWARD

ful, I can tell you, and he had us all out from under the wagons, though it was very cold, and sent us out to the ridge above the drift. And there we lay in the long grass among the bushes on our rifles, while the feldkornet crawled to and fro behind us on his belly and cursed those who were talking. I didn't talk—I know too much about war. But your man did. I heard him, and the feldkornet swore at him in a whisper.'

" 'What was he saying?' Anna asked quickly.

" 'Oh, dreadful things. He called him a dirty takhaar with a hair-hung tongue, and ——'

" 'No, no !' cried Anna impatiently. 'What did my husband say, I mean? What was he talking about when the feldkornet stopped him?'

" 'Oh, he was just saying that it would be worth turning out into the cold if only the Kafirs would come. And then he cried out, "What's that moving?" and the feldkornet crawled up and cursed him.'

" 'Go on about the fight,' said Anna, looking

TALES FROM THE VELDT

from him, that he might not see what spoke in her eyes.

“ ‘Yes. Well, I was just getting nicely to sleep, when somebody down on my left began firing. Then I saw, down the hill, the flashes of guns, and soon I could hear great lumps of pot-leg screaming through the air. They are firing a lot of pot-leg, those Kafirs. I fired at a flash that came out pretty regularly, and by and by it ceased to flash. Then, as I rose on my knees, a great knob of pot-leg hit me in the shoulder, and I cried out and fell down. Your husband came to me and helped me to go back to the rocks, and soon after all the shooting stopped. The Burghers found three dead Kafirs in the morning, so we won.’

“ ‘You were very brave,’ said Anna.

“ ‘Yes, wasn’t I? And so was your husband, I believe,’ said the wounded man. ‘I couldn’t see him, but I’ve no doubt he was. They’ll try to rush the drift again to-night.’

“ ‘What makes you think so?’ Anna demanded, starting.

“ ‘Oh, they’ve been gathering for some days,’

THE COWARD

answered the other. 'It's what they are trying to do. You see there are no farms to plunder on the other side of the river, so they must cross.'

" 'I see,' said Anna slowly.

"When he was ready, she helped the wounded man again to his saddle, and saw him away, then turned, with the light of a swift resolution in her eyes, to the task of getting ready to go to Andreas. The river and the hills were but a short six hours from her farm, and on a horse she could have ridden it in less. But it was no wish of hers to bring any slur upon her husband, so she prepared to go to him in a cart, taking shirts and shoes and tobacco, like a dutiful wife visiting her husband on commando. And for a purpose she took no trouble to name to herself, she put in her pocket a little pugnosed revolver which Andreas had once bought, played with for a while, and then forgotten.

"A Kafir came with her, to see to the horses and so on, for she was to travel in no other manner than that in which Burghers' wives travel every day ; but once clear of the farm she

TALES FROM THE VELDT

took the reins and the whip to herself, and drove swiftly, pushing the team anxiously along the way. So well did she guide her path, that by evening they were slipping down the road towards the drift of the Tiger River, and when the light of day began to be mottled with night, they had crossed the drift and were passing up the right bank. When at length the darkness came, they were at the foot of the hills which the commando held.

“Here Anna alighted, and left the ‘boy’ to outspan and watch the cart. In a basket on her arm she had a bottle of whiskey and a bottle of medicine for rheumatism, that would make her coming seemly, and with the little revolver in her pocket knocking against her knee at every step, she faced the dark and the empty veld, and began the ascent of the hill alone. She was come to be a spur to her husband. This she knew clearly enough, yet as she went along, with the thin wind of the night on her forehead, she wasted no thoughts, but bent herself to the business of finding the laager and coming to Andreas. About her were the sombre hills, that

THE COWARD

are, in fact, mere bushy kopjes, but in the darkness, and to one alone, portentous and devious mountains. Veld-bred as she was, the business of path-finding was with her an instinct, like that of throwing up your hand to guard your eyes when sparks spout from the fire. Yet in an hour she lost herself utterly.

"She strove here and there, practising all the tricks of the hunter to avoid moving in a circle, and so on. She wrenched her skirts through bushes that seemed to have hands. She plunged over stones that were noisy and ragged underfoot; she tumbled in ant-bear holes and bruised herself on ant-hills. And after a long time she sat down and listened—listened patiently for the alarm of firing to beckon a course to her. And there she waited, her basket on her knee, her arms folded across it, for all the world like a quiet woman in church, with no tremors, but only a mild and enduring expectancy.

"It came at last, a tempest of shooting that seemed all round her. Below her, and to her left, there were splashes of white flame. The fighter's daughter knew at once that these were

TALES FROM THE VELDT

from Kafir guns. Overhead, the rip-rip-rip of the Burghers' rifles pattered like rain on a roof, like hoofs on a road. And all was near at hand. Despite her endeavors, she had come nearly the whole way round the hill, and was now barely outside the cross-fire. She stood up, shaking her skirts into order, and took in the position. It was a bad one, but it pointed the way to Andreas, and with a pat to her tumbled clothes she settled the bottles safely again in the basket and resumed her climbing.

"She thrust along through the bushes, while the clatter of the rifles grew nearer, and presently there was a flick—like a frog diving into mud—close by her feet, and she knew there were bullets coming her way. Flick—plop! It came again and again and again.

"'Some one sees me moving and is shooting at me,' said Anna to herself, and stopped to rest where a rock gave cover. The bullets, lobbing like pellets tossed from a window, came singing down towards her, clicking into the bushes, while below she could see the progress of the battle written in leaping dots of fire.

THE COWARD

The Kafirs were spreading among the boulders—so much could be read from the growing breadth of the line of their fire, and Anna was quick to grasp the meaning of this movement. They were preparing to rush the hill, as of old the Basutos had done. The Kafirs with guns were being sent out to the flanks of the line to keep up a fire while the centre went forward with the assegais. It was an old *manceuvre*; she had heard her brothers talk of it many times, and also—she remembered it now—of the counter-trick to meet it. There must be bush at hand, to set fire to, that the advance may be seen as soon as it forms and withered with musketry.

“Regardless of that deft rifleman among the Burghers who continued to drop his bullets about her, Anna took her basket again on her arm, came forth from her rock, and resumed the climb. She was obliged to make a good deal of noise, for it was too dark and uncomfortable to enable her to choose her steps well. Up above, the Burghers must have heard her plainly, though none but a keen eye would pick

TALES FROM THE VELDT

the blackness of her shape from the bosom of the night. The summit and the foot of the hill were alive with the spitting of the guns, and all the while the unknown sharpshooter searched about her for her life with clever plunging shots that flicked the dirt up. One bullet whisked through a piece of her skirt.

“‘Now, I wonder if it can be Andreas who shoots so neatly,’ said Anna, half-smiling to herself. ‘He would be surprised if he knew what he is shooting at. Dear me, this is a very long and tiresome hill.’

“It was almost at that moment that she heard it—the beginning of the rush. There came up the hill, like a slow and solemn drum-music, the droning war-song of the Kafirs as they moved forward in face of the fire. It was an awful thing to hear, that bloody rhythm booming through the dome of the night. It is a song I have heard in the daytime, for a show, and it rings like heavy metal. Anna straightened herself and looked about her; there was nothing else for it but that she must start a fire, ere the battle-line swept up and on to the

THE COWARD

laager. It would draw more shooting upon her; but that gave her no pause. She had matches in her pocket, and fumbled about her and found a little thorn-bush that crackled while it tore her naked hands. Crouching by it, she dragged a bunch of the matches across the side of the box,—they spluttered and flamed, and she thrust them into the bush. It took light slowly, for there were yet the dregs of sap in it; but as it lighted, the deft rifleman squirted bullet after bullet all around her, aiming on the weakling flame she nursed with her bleeding hands.

“But for this she had no care at all. She had ceased to perceive it. Sheltering the place with her body, she drew out more matches, tore up grass, and built the little flame to a blaze that promised to hold and grow. As it cracked among the twigs, she wrenched the bush from the ground and ran forward with it upheld.

“‘Burghers, Burghers!’ she screamed. ‘Pas op! The Kafirs are coming up the hill!’

“And whirling it widely she flung the burning bush from her with all her force, and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

watched its fire spread in the grass where it fell. Then she, too, fell down, and lay among the rocks and plants, scarcely breathing.

"Up above, the old commandant, peering under the pent of his hand, saw the torch waved and the figure that flung it.

"'Allemachtig!' he cried. 'It's the Vrouw van Wyck!'

"The next instant he was shouting, 'And here come the Kafirs! Shoot, Burghers, shoot straight and hard.'

"Where she lay, near the fire that now spread across the flank of the hill in broad bands among the dry grass and withered bushes, the Vrouw van Wyck heard that last cry and lifted her head as a torrent of shooting answered it. The Kafirs and the Burghers were at grips, and it seemed that all around her the night rustled with secret men that slunk about. There was great danger to her at last, for either in going forward or going back she might fall into the hands of the Kafirs, and—oh, you can never tell what that may mean! At the best and choicest it is death, but at the

THE COWARD

worst it is torment with loathly outrage, the torment and the degradation of Sheol. Anna knew that, knew it well and feared it. That daunted her, and as the thought grew clearer in her mind, dread gripped her, and she huddled among the stones with ears alert and a heart that clacked as it beat.

"Noises threatened her, and to them, the casual noises of the night, she gave ear anxiously, while above her the fight raged direfully and all unheard. At one time she truly saw naked Kafirs go up the hill,—the light of the fire glinted on the points of their assegais and threw a dull gleam on the muscle-rippled skin of them. Next, stones falling made her start, and ere this alarm was passed she heard the unmistakable clatter of shod feet among the boulders, and—plain and loud—an oath as some man stumbled. He was already to be seen, vaguely; then he was near at hand, coming upon her.

"'Now, what in God's name is this?' she cried, and rose. In her hand was the little blunt-nosed revolver.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"The man ran through a bush towards her. 'Anna,' he cried, 'Anna!'

"It was Andreas, and he took hold of her body and pressed her close to him.

"She thrilled with a superb exaltation of pride and joy, and put her arms about him.

"'What are you doing here?' he demanded.

"'I was coming to you,' she said, and with a little laugh, as of a girl, she showed him the basket, with the bottles yet in it. 'And you?' she asked, then.

"'Me?' he said. 'Why, I've come for you, of course. The Kafirs are at the ridge, and God knows what might happen to you. Was it you I was shooting at down there all the time?'

"'You shot very well,' she answered, and showed him the hole in her skirt where the bullet had pierced it. She heard him mutter another oath.

"'But we must be going,' he said; 'this is no place to be talking—no place at all. We must get round to the laager again. Let me have your arm, and tread quietly, and we must leave the basket.'

THE COWARD

“‘Not I,’ she answered. ‘I have brought it all this way, and I will not leave it now.’

“He answered with a short laugh, and they commenced to move upward. But by now the fire had hold of the thorn-trees all about, and their path was as light as day. It was too dangerous to attempt to climb to the ridge, and after walking for a while they were compelled to find the cover of a rock and remain still. Anna sat on the ground, very tired and content, and her husband peered out and watched what was to be seen.

“‘We have beaten them,’ he said. ‘I can see a lot of them running back. Pray God none come this way. I wish I had not left my rifle.’

“‘Yes,’ said Anna, ‘you left your rifle, and came unarmed to help me.’

“‘It would have been awkward among the bushes,’ he explained, and was suddenly silent, looking out over the top of the rock.

“‘What is it?’ asked Anna. He gave no answer, so she rose and went to his side and looked too, with her arms on his shoulder.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"The rip-rip of the Burghers' rifles sounded yet, but there was now another sound. The bushes creaked and the stones rocked with men returning down the hill. Not two hundred paces away they were to be seen—many scores of Kafirs dodging down-hill, taking what cover they could, pausing and checking at each rock and mound that gave shelter from the bullets.

"Anna felt her husband quiver as he saw the crowd swooping upon him.

"‘Take this,’ she said, and pressed the little revolver into his hand. ‘It would be well not to be taken. But kiss me first.’

"He looked from the retreating and nearing Kafirs to her, with a face knotted in perplexity.

"‘It is the only thing,’ she urged, and drew his lips to hers.

"He looked down at the little weapon in his palm, and spoke as with an effort.

"‘I was never a brave man, Anna,’ he said, ‘and I can’t do this. Will you not do it?’

"She nodded and took the pistol. The Kafirs found nothing to work their hate upon."

HER OWN STORY

“**B**UT what are you going to live on?” asked the Vrouw Grobelaar. “You haven’t got a farm.”

“We’re going to live in a town,” answered Katje proudly.

I interrupted here, and tried to make the old lady understand that even schoolmasters received some money for their work, and that there would be enough for two, without frills.

She had no answer for the moment, but sat and looked at us both very thoughtfully. Still, there was no hostility in her aspect; she had not her warlike manner, and seemed engrossed rather with an estimate of the situation than of its consequences. I had looked for opposition and disparagement at least, volubly voiced and backed with a bloody example of a failure in marriage, and I know that Katje shared my misgivings. But here was something different.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"You—you are not angry?" asked Katje after a while.

The old lady started. "Angry! No, of course not. It is not altogether my affair, Katje. As time goes on, I grow nervous of stirring any broth but my own. If it were a matter of mere wisdom, and knowledge of life, and the cool head of an elder, I should not be afraid to handle you to suit my ideas; but this is a graver piece of business. Wisdom has nothing to do with it: those who are wise in their love are often foolish in their life. You've got your man, and if you want him you'll marry him in despite of the tongues of men and of angels. I know; I did it myself."

"You?" cried Katje.

"Yes, me," retorted the Vrouw Grobelaar. "Why not? Do you think that a person of sense has no feelings? When I was a girl I was nearly as big a fool as some others I could name, and got more out of it, in happiness and experience, than ever they will."

"Tell us about it," suggested Katje.

"I am telling you," snapped the old lady.

HER OWN STORY

"Don't interrupt. Sit down. Don't fidget; nor giggle. There.

"When I was a girl," she began at last, "my father's farm was at Windhoek, and beyond the nek to the south, an easy two hours from our beacons, there lived one Kornel du Plessis. I came to know him, somehow. I saw him here and there, till I had no wish to see any but him, and we understood one another very well. Ah, Katje, girls are light things; but I truly think that in those days few Boer maids had much mind for trivial matters in their loves when once the man was found right and sound. Even at this length of time I have a thrill in remembering Kornel: a big man, and heavy, with thick shoulders, but very quick on his feet, and eyes that were gray, with pleasant little puckers at the corner. He sat far back in his saddle and lolled to the gait of the horse easily; such men make horse-masters, and masters of women. That is to say, they are masters of all.

"There was no kissing behind the kraal and whispering at windows. Neither of us had a mind for these meannesses. He came to my

TALES FROM THE VELDT

father's house and took food with us, and told my father the tale of his sheep and cattle, and the weight of the mortgage on his farm. Though he was not rich, he was young and keen, and my father knew well that the richest are not those who begin life with riches. There would have been no hindrance to a marriage forthwith, but for some law business in the town, of which I never understood the truth. But it concerned the land and house of Kornel, and my father would not say the last word till that should be settled.

"It dragged on for a long while, that law matter, and the conversations between Kornel and my father ran mainly in guesses about it, with much talk that was very forlorn of interest. But what did it matter to me? I had the man, and knew I could keep him; had I foreseen the future, even then I would not have cared. But for all that, I was very uneasy one hot day when Kornel rode over with a grave face and eyes that looked as though he had not slept the night before.

"My father gave him a sharp look, and

HER OWN STORY

pulled strongly at his pipe, like a man who prepares for ticklish business.

“‘You have news?’ he asked.

“Kornel nodded, and looked at me. It was a look as though he would ask me to spare and forgive. I smiled at him, and came and stood at his side.

“‘From what you have told me,’ began my father, looking very wise, ‘the water right may cut you off from the pastures. Is that so?’

“‘No,’ said Kornel; ‘all that is wrong.’

“‘H’m. Indeed! Then you will have to carry your north beacon farther to the east and lose the dam.’

“‘Wrong again,’ answered Kornel patiently.

“‘Then you have won your case,’ said my father, very eager to name the truth and prove his wisdom.

“‘Dear me!’ said Kornel; ‘you have no idea at all of the matter. You are quite out in your guesses. I have not won my case: I have lost it, and the land and the house and the stock along with it. I came over on a horse that is no more mine than this chair is. For all I know

TALES FROM THE VELDT

my very trousers may belong to the other man. There you have it. What do you say to that ?'

" 'Then you have nothing at all ?' asked my father.

" 'I have a piece of waste on the dorp road, near the spruit,' answered Kornel. 'There is a kind of hut on it. That is all. It is only two morgen' (four acres).

" 'My father sat shaking his head in silence for a long time, while Kornel clenched and unclenched his hands and stared at the floor and frowned. I put my hand on his shoulder, and he trembled.

" 'It is an affliction,' said my father at last, 'and no doubt you know very well what you have done to deserve it. But it might be worse. You might have had a wife, and then what would you have done ?'

" 'One is wise to honor one's parents always, but one cannot be blind. I think my father might sometimes have spoken less and done better for it.

" 'We have talked about Christina yonder,' continued my father, pointing at me with the

stem of his pipe. 'It is a good thing it went no further than talk.'

"'But it did,' I said quickly. 'It went much further. It went to my promise and Kornel's; and if I am ready to keep mine now, I shall not look to see him fail in his.'

"Ah! He never needed any but the smallest spur. Your true man kindles quickly. At my word he sprang up and his arm folded me. I gasped in the grip of it.

"'My promise holds,' he said, through clenched teeth.

"My father had a way of behaving like a landdrost (magistrate) at times, and now he wrinkled his forehead and smiled very wisely.

"'When one's bed is on the veld,' he said, 'it is not the time to remember a promise to a girl. It is easier to find a bedfellow than a blanket sometimes. And then, I am to be considered, and I cannot suffer this kind of thing.'

"'I think you will have to manage it,' answered Kornel.

"'Do you?' said my father. 'Well, I have

TALES FROM THE VELDT

nothing to give you. Christina, come here to me !’

“ Kornel loosed his arm and set me free, but I stayed where I was.

“ ‘ Father,’ I cried, ‘ I have promised Kornel.’

“ ‘ Come here !’ he said again. Then, when I did not move, disobeying him for the first time in my life, his face darkened. ‘ Are you not coming ?’ he said.

“ ‘ No,’ I answered, and my man’s arm took me again, tight—tight, Katje.

“ ‘ Well,’ said my father, ‘ you had better be off, the two of you. Do not come here again.’

“ ‘ We can do that much to please you,’ answered Kornel, with his head very high. ‘ Come, Christina !’

“ And I followed him from my father’s house. I had not even a hat for my head.

“ We were married forthwith, of course—no later than the next day,—and the day after that I rode with my man to the plot beside the dorp spruit to see our home that had to be. That was a great day for me ; and to be going in gentle companionship with Kornel across the

HER OWN STORY

staring veld and along the empty road was a most wonderful thing, and its flavor is still a relish to my memory. I knew that he feared what we were to see—the littleness and mean poverty of it, after the spaciousness of the farm ; but most of all it galled him that I should see it on this our first triumphant day. He was very gentle and most loving, but shadows grew on his face, and there was a track of worry between his brows that spurred me. I knew what I had to do, now that our fortunes were knitted, and I did it.

“The plot was a slope from the edge of the dorp to the little spruit, not fenced nor sundered in any way from the squalid brick which houses the lower end of Dopfontein. Full in face of it was the location of the Kafirs ; around it and close at hand were the gross and dirty huts of the off-colors (half-castes). The house, which was in the middle of the plot, was a bulging hovel of green brick, no more stately or respectable than any of the huts round about. As our horses picked their way through the muck underfoot, and we rode down to it, the off-colors

TALES FROM THE VELDT

swarmed out of their burrows and grinned and pointed at us.

"Kornel helped me from my saddle, and we went together to see the inside of the house. It was very foul and broken, with the plain traces of Kafirs in each of its two rooms, and a horrid litter everywhere. As I looked round I saw Kornel straighten himself quickly, and my eyes went to his.

" 'This is our home,' he said bluntly, with a twitching of the cheek.

"I nodded.

" 'Perhaps,' he said in the same hard tone, as if he were awaiting an onslaught of reproach,— 'perhaps I was wrong to bring you to this, but it is too late to tell me so now. It is not much——'

"I broke in and laughed. 'You will not know it when I have set it to rights,' I answered. 'It shall be a home indeed by the time I am through with it.'

"His cheek twitched yet, as though some string under the flesh were quivering with a strain.

" 'It's you and me against all the evil luck.

HER OWN STORY

in the world,' he cried, but his face was softening.

"I cowered within the arm he held out to me, and told him I was all impatience to begin the fight. And he cried on my shoulder, and I held him to me and soothed him from a spring of motherhood that broke loose in my heart.

"Within a week we were living in the place, and, Katje, I hope you will feel yet for some roof what I felt for that, with all its poorness. It was the first home of my wifehood: I loved it. I worked over it, as later I worked over the children God bestowed on me, purging it, remaking it, spending myself on it, and gilding it with the joy of the work. From the beams of the roof to the step of the door I cleansed it with my hands, marking it by its spotlessness for the habitation of white folk among the yellow people all around. Kornel did little to aid me in that—for the most part he was seeking work in the town; and even when he was at home I drove him sharply from the labor that was mine, and mine alone. The yellow people were very curious about it all, and would

TALES FROM THE VELDT

stand and watch me through the door till Kornel sjamboked them away; and even then some of their fat talkative women would come round with offers of help and friendship. But though we were fallen to poverty, we had not come so low as that; and few came to me a second time, and none a third.

“Still, though Kornel humbled himself and asked very little money, there was no work to be had in the dorp. No storekeeper had a use for him, and the transport agents had too many riders already. Day after day went by, and each day he came back more grim, with a duller light in those kind eyes of his and a slower twinkle.

“‘You must trust in yourself,’ I told him, as he sat by the table and would have it that he was not hungry.

“‘I trust in you,’ he answered, with a pitiable attempt at his old sparkle. ‘You have proved yourself; I have not—yet, and I could do the work of three Kafirs, too.’

“The next day he came home at noon, with a swing in his gait and his fingers working.

HER OWN STORY

“‘I’ve got work,’ he said, ‘at last.’

“I stopped sewing and looked at him. ‘Is it a white man’s work?’ I asked.

“‘It is work,’ he retorted.

“‘Very well,’ I said ; ‘but remember, we sink or soar together, and in neither case will I blame you. If you get white man’s work, you shall have a white man’s wife ; but if you are going to do the work of Kafirs ——’

“‘Yes,’ he said ; ‘and what then?’

“‘In that case,’ I answered, ‘I shall do washing to eke it out and be a level mate for you.’

“‘By God, you won’t!’ he cried, and his hand came down hard on the table. There was no mistaking his face : the command and the earnestness of it lighted up his eyes. I stared at him in a good deal of surprise, for though I had known it was there, this was the first I had seen of the steel strain in my man.

“‘Call it Kafir work, or what you please,’ he went on, with a briskness of speech that made answer impossible. ‘You will keep this house and concern yourself with that only. The gain-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

ing of money is my affair. Leave it to me, therefore.'

"I cast down my eyes, knowing I must obey, but a little while after I asked him again what the work was to be.

" 'Making bricks,' he answered. 'Here we have the spruit at our door and mud for the picking up. It needs only a box-mould or two, and it will be funny if I can't turn out as many good bricks in a day as three lazy Kafirs. Old Pagan, the contractor, has said he will buy them, so now it only remains to get to work.'

"As he said this, I noticed the uneasiness that kept him from meeting my eye, for in truth it was a sorry employ to put his strength to,—a dirty toil, all the dirtier for the fact that only Kafirs handled it in Dopfontein, and the pay was poor. From our door one could always see the brick-making going on along the spruit, with the mud-streaked niggers standing knee-deep in the water, packing the wet dirt into the boxes, and spilling them out to be baked in the sun or fired, as the case might be.

HER OWN STORY

There was too much grime and discomfort to it to be a respectable trade.

"But Kornel went to work at once, carrying down box-moulds from the contractor's yard, and stacking them in the stiff gray mud at the edge of the spruit. I went with him to see him start. He waded down over his boots, into the slow water, and plunged his arms elbow-deep into the mud.

"'Here's to an honest living,' he said, and lifted a great lump of slime into the first box and kneaded it close. Then, as he set it aside and reached for the next, he looked up to me with a smile that was all awry. My heart bled for him.

"'But there's no time to be polite,' he said, as the mud squelched into the second box. 'Here's the time to prove how a white man can work when he goes about it. So run back to the house, my *kleintje*, and leave me to make my fortune.'

"And forthwith he braced himself and went at that sorry work with all his fine strength. I had not the heart to stay by him; I knew that

TALES FROM THE VELDT

my eyes upon him were like offering him an insult, and yet I never looked at him save in love. But once or twice I glanced from the doorway, and saw him bowed still over that ruthless task, slaving doggedly, as good men do with good work.

“When the evening meal was due he came in, drenched from head to foot, and patched and lathered with the pale sticky mud; but though he was so tired that he drooped like a sick man where he stood, his face was bright again and his eyes were once more a-twinkle with hope and confidence.

“As he changed his clothes and washed himself, he talked cheerily to me through the wall, with a spirit like a boy’s.

“‘I’ve begun, at any rate,’ he called out, ‘and that’s a great thing. If I go as far forward as I’ve gone back, I shall be satisfied. Where did you say the comb was?’

“And all through supper he chattered in the same vein, rejoicing in the muscles that ached with work and in his capacity to do more and bear more than the Kafirs who were his rivals.

HER OWN STORY

For me, I was pleased enough and thankful to hear the heart of him thus vocal, and to mark the man I knew of old and chose to be my mate come to light in this laborer, new from his toil.

“We did not sit late that night, for, with all his elation and reawakened spirits, Kornel was weary to the honest bone of him, and swayed with sleep as he stood on his feet. He rolled into my clean, cool sheets with a grunt of utter satisfaction. ‘This is comfort indeed,’ he said drowsily, as I leaned over him, and he was asleep before I had answered.

“At daylight he rose and went forth to the spruit again, and there all day he labored earnestly. Each time that I looked towards him I saw his back bent and his arms plunging in the mud, while the rows of wet bricks grew longer and multiplied. I heard him whistling at it,—some English melody he had gathered long before at a waapenschauw,—with a light heart, the while he was up to his knees in the dirty water, with the mud plastered all over him.

“By and by I went down to the bank and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

asked him how he did. He straightened himself, grimacing humorously at the stiffness of his back, and answered me cheerily.

“‘To-morrow old Pagan will come down and pay for what I have done,’ he said. ‘I think he will be surprised at the amount. His Kafirs have no such appetite for it as I.’ And he laughed.

“It was a dreadful business he had taken in hand, and work hard beyond believing. The boxes stood in a pile above the stream, and each had to be reached down as one was filled, and as soon as two were full Kornel must climb the bank to set them aside. When all were full, they had to be turned out on the level ground, and all this, as you can see, meant that he must scramble up and down in the heavy mud, taxing every spring in his poor body. Yet he toiled ceaselessly, attacking the job with a kind of light-hearted desperation that made nothing of its hardships, bringing to it a tough and unconquerable joy in the mere effort, which drove him ever like a spur.

“As I watched him delving, I thought that

HER OWN STORY

here a woman could render some measure of help, and as he turned from talking to me I began to empty out the boxes that were ready and stack them again on the pile. I had not yet turned out ten bricks when he saw me, and paused in his melancholy work.

“‘Stop that!’ he cried, and scrambled out of the spruit to where I stood. ‘I suppose,’ he went on, ‘you would like your father to know that I had suffered you to work for me like a Kafir.’

“‘Kornel!’ I cried in horror.

“But he was white on the cheek-bones and breathing hard, and I could not soften him.

“‘Rich man’s daughter or poor man’s wife,’ he said, ‘you are white, and must keep your station. It is my business to sell myself, not yours. Get you back to the house I have given you, and stay there.’

“And with that he picked up the soft bricks I had turned for him, and threw them one by one into the spruit.

“‘Poverty and meanness and all,’ he added, ‘it shall not be said at your father’s house that

TALES FROM THE VELDT

you worked for me. Nor that you lacked aught it became you to have, neither,' he added, with a quick heat of temper. 'Get to your house.'

"I slunk off, crying like a child, while he went back to the mud—and the labor.

"Next day came Pagan to pay for the work that was done. He drove up in his smart cart, and tiptoed his way daintily to the edge of the spruit where the bricks lay. He was an old man, very cleanly dressed, with hard white hair on his head and face, and a quick manner of looking from side to side like a little bird. In all his aspect there was nothing but spoke of easy wealth and the serenity of a well-ordered life; there was even that unkindly sharpness of tone and manner that is a dead-weight on the well-to-do. My husband was at work when he drove up, but he straightened his back, squared his broad shoulders, and came up from the mud, walking at the full of his height and smiling down at the rich man with half-closed eyes.

"'Daag, Heer Pagan,' he said to him, in the tone of one who needs and desires nothing, and

HER OWN STORY

held out his hand—mud from the elbow—with something lordly in the gesture. The rich man cocked his head quickly, in the way he had, and hung in the breeching for a moment, ere he rendered his hand to Kornel, with a reddening of the cheek above his white whisker that betrayed him, I thought, for a paltry soul.

“ ‘I’ve come to see your bricks,’ he said curtly, ‘and to pay for ’em, if they’re all right.’

“ ‘Ah, the bricks,’ said Kornel airily. ‘Yes, to be sure. There they are. Go and count them, if you like, and then you can come to me at my house where the Vrouw du Plessis (which was me) will give us some coffee.’

“I was watching, you may be sure, and again I saw the wintry red swell above the white whisker, and I clenched my hands in wrath and contempt at the creature’s littleness. I was sure he would have liked to sweep my man’s courtesy aside, and certainly the politeness had a prick in it. He was rich, and old, and fat, with a consequence in his mien and an air that hinted he was used to deference, and Kornel was but a muddy brick-moulder. Yet

TALES FROM THE VELDT

there stood my man, so easy in his quiet speech, so sure of himself, so dangerous a target for contempt, that the rich man only stammered. Kornel nodded as though he understood the invitation to be accepted, and walked up to the house, leaving old Pagan to count the bricks and follow.

"I kissed him as he came in. 'You've trampled his dirty soul under your heel,' I said, 'and I love you for it. I love to see you upright and a man of purpose ; whatever comes of it, I shall honor you always.'

"He kissed me and laughed. 'Nothing will happen, if we are lucky,' he said. 'There is more in John Pagan than the big stomach and the money. But we mustn't crawl to him ; I'll wager he never crawled himself when he was poor.'

"I set the coffee ready, spreading the table with a fine cloth I had brought from Kornel's farm, one of the few things we had taken with us, and presently in came old Pagan. Directly I saw him I felt a doubt of him ; there was a kind of surreptitious viciousness showing

HER OWN STORY

in his sour smile that warned me. He was like a man who is brewing an unpleasant joke.

“‘Ah, Mrs. du Plessis,’ he said, ‘your man will have been working very hard.’

“‘You know what brick-moulding is, then?’ I said.

“‘He grinned. ‘A little,’ he said ; ‘yes, a little. There’s few jobs I haven’t put a hand to in my time. Work’s a fine thing, when a man knows how to work.’

“‘You are very right,’ agreed Kornel.

“‘This is good coffee,’ said John Pagan, as he stirred his cup. ‘In fact, it’s better than the bricks.’

“‘A better hand was at work on it,’ said Kornel.

“‘So I should judge,’ answered Pagan sleekly. ‘I should like another cup of this coffee, if I may trouble you, Mrs. du Plessis.’

“He laid his cup on the table and bit his nails while I filled it, glancing round at my poor room the while and smiling to himself.

“‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I like the coffee, but I don’t like the bricks. They’re no good at all.’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“We both stared at him, silent and aghast, and the white-haired old man chuckled in our stricken faces.

“‘What is wrong with them?’ demanded Kornel at last. His face was white, but he spoke quite naturally.

“‘Aha!’ laughed old Pagan. ‘Ye see, there’s no trade, that ye can take up without a bit o’ learning, not even makin’ mud-bricks. The very same thing happened to me. Lord, it’s past forty years ago! I turned out six hundred dozen, and had ’em thrown on my hands. It nearly broke my heart.’

“‘I can understand that,’ said Kornel. ‘But what is wrong with my bricks?’

“Old Pagan set his cup back on the table and sat up in his chair. As he began to speak he hitched back the sleeves of his coat and moved his neck in his white collar.

“‘See here!’ he said. ‘It’s a little thing, like turning up the toe of a horseshoe, but just as essential. When ye set your full moulds out to dry, did ye set ’em on edge, to drain away the water? Ye did not? Well, that’s

HER OWN STORY

what's wrong. They're just mud-pies—lumps o' damp dirt, that'll crumble as soon as they're dry. There's ninety dozen of 'em, by my count, and there'll not be three dozen that ye could use in any way consistent wi' conscience. Do ye take my meanin'?'

"Kornel nodded very thoughtfully.

"'Well, you'll just need to get to work again,' said the old man. 'Maybe I'm not exactly keen on greetings and invitations and the like, but you'll not be able to teach me anything on bricks. So if ye're thinking anything about the splendor o' your work, wait till ye're master of it before you waste more thought. I'm your better as a craftsman,' he said, with a glance towards me.

"I was red all over, what with shame and sorrow, but I marked that the paltriness seemed to have gone from John Pagan as soon as he began to talk of work. He turned then to Kornel with a briskness that was not unkindly.

"'I was relying on you for bricks,' he said, 'for you can work, and that's a fact. Perhaps you can let me have a hundred dozen by

TALES FROM THE VELDT

Thursday, eh? I'm waitin' on them. And if you make sure of it, I'll do wi' ye what's my common custom, and that's pay half the price in advance. How'll that suit?'

"Kornel rose from his chair and stammered thanks, and John Pagan paid the money on to the table.

" 'I'll be down on Thursday to see the bricks,' he said, 'and don't forget the dodge I told ye. And maybe Mrs. du Plessis'll be willing to give me coffee again when I come. So good-day to ye, and mind—drain 'em!'

"When he was gone Kornel and I looked at each other and laughed emptily. Then he went out to the mud again to make ready for Thursday.

"So it was we lived for a time that was shorter than it seemed, building on the mud of our shaky fortunes a pride that our poverty could not overturn. Kornel had a saying that seemed irreligious but very true. 'There are ministers and farmers and lawyers who are rich,' he would observe, 'but there's no money in work.' I have since been won to believe

HER OWN STORY

that there is a flaw in the argument, but for us it was true, and bitterly true. We were never on the right side of ten shillings; we were never out of sight of the thin brink of want. That we were preserved and kept clear of disaster was due only to the toil of Kornel and my own anxious care for the spending of the money. I found out that a wife who is strong has a great trade to drive in upholding her house; and I, at any rate, was proficient in maintaining cleanliness, in buying and making food, and preserving to my home the atmosphere of happiness and welcome that anchors a man to his own place. Take it all in all, we were happy, and yet I would not pretend that there were not grim hours when we wondered if the mere living were worth all that it cost. Kornel, hard as iron always, grew lean and stooped, and there appeared in his face a kind of wild care that frightened me. From the chill upcoming of the dawn to the rising of the wind at evening he taxed himself remorselessly at the sorry work in the mud, while I scrubbed and scraped and plotted and prayed to make the meagre pay

TALES FROM THE VELDT

cover wants that were pared meagre enough. Yes, there were certainly times when we thought the cost too great, but, God be praised, we never thought it at the same moment, and the stronger always upheld the weaker.

“And there was never any shame in the matter. Even as we feared nothing, we were never ashamed. Never!

“One morning, about an hour before high sun, when the dust lay thick on the road into the town that passed our land, and the neighborhood around was feverish with the fuss of the Kafirs and yellow folk, I stood for a moment at my door, looking down to where Kornel was fervently at work in the spruit. There was always traffic on the road at that hour, and something drew me to look towards it. At once I saw my father. He was riding in, dressed in his black clothes, very solemn and respectable, with his beard flowing over his chest. At the same moment he saw me, and seemed to start in his saddle and glance quickly at all about—at my poor little house, the litter that lay about, the squalor of the town-end we

TALES FROM THE VELDT

lived in, and the laborious bent back of my man as he squattered about in the mud. He checked his horse an instant, as though by an impulse; for my father, though I honored him, was a weak man, in whom no purpose was steadfast. I saw the wavering in his face and the uncertainty of his big pale eyes; and then, half-nodding to me as though in an embarrassment, he pushed on and entered the town. I went down and told Kornel.

“‘H’m!’ He stood as though in thought, looking up to me from the water. ‘Your father, eh? Would you like him to come and see you?’

“I nodded.

“He laughed and climbed up the bank to me. ‘So would I,’ he said. ‘I have a stiffness in my back that makes me inclined for anything rather than this work. Even your father.’

“We walked up to the house together, and Kornel’s brow was creased with thought, while his lips smiled.

“‘You see,’ he said, ‘we want nothing from

HER OWN STORY

him—nothing at all, so we can't afford to be humble. Have we any money at all?'

" 'We have three shillings,' I answered, 'and I owe one shilling for food.'

" 'That's not enough,' he said, shaking his head. 'You say he saw me working? We must have thirty shillings at least; we must treat him well; I can't let him off now that he has seen so much. We'll stuff him till he bulges like a rotten cask, and wishes he could make bricks as I can. I wonder if Pagan would pay me in advance for a thousand dozen. I'll go and ask him.'

" He started for the door at once, but turned and came back to me.

" 'He said once he had nothing to give me,' he whispered to me. 'Do you grudge me this, *kleintje*?'

" 'Not I,' I answered. 'I only wish we could do more.'

" He kissed me and was off in a moment. Pagan made no difficulty about the money. He looked at Kornel shrewdly when my man made the request, and paid at once.

HER OWN STORY

“‘It suits me ye should be a wee thing in my debt,’ he said. ‘But you’re so damned proud, there’s times I’m scared o’ ye. Sign yer name here.’

“‘Now,’ said Kornel, when he had put the money in my hand, ‘get what you need for a dinner that will tickle the ou pa’s stomach, and a bottle of whiskey. There never was a deacon that did not suffer from some complaint that whiskey would ease; and I’ll get into what clean clothes I have and go to look for him.’

“So I bought the dinner. I was willing enough to suffer the emptiness to come, if only I could wipe from my father’s memory his impression of my man’s poverty; but all the same, in case he should refuse to visit us, I bought things that would last long enough to serve ourselves until the thirty shillings should have been earned. They made a good show: for I have never been a fool in the matter of food, and I knew my father’s tastes. I promised myself that his dinner should be his chief memory of that day, at all events. He was, I fear, the

TALES FROM THE VELDT

kind of man who remembers his good dinners better than anything else.

“It was a long time before they came, and I had given up all hope of the visit when I heard their voices. Or rather, it was Kornel’s voice that I heard, in a tone of careless civility, like one who performs a casual duty of politeness. He was talking nonsense in a slow drawl, and as they picked their way from the road to the house my father looked up to him in a kind of wonder.

“‘The evenings are pleasant here,’ Kornel was saying. ‘We have a little time to ourselves then, for people have learned at last not to trouble us much. One sees the sun go down yonder across the hills, and it is very pretty. Now, on the farm, nobody ever knew how handsome the sunset is. We were like Kafirs on the farm ; but life in the town is quite different.’

“He chattered on in the same strain, and my father was plainly dazed by it, so that his judgment was all fogged, and he took the words at their face-value. I noticed that my father

HER OWN STORY

seemed a little abashed and doubtful : it was easy to see that this was the opposite of what he had expected.

"He greeted me with a touch of hesitation in his manner ; but I kissed him on the forehead and tried to appear a fortunate daughter—smiling assuredly, you know, glad to exercise hospitality and to receive my father in my own house. It was not all seeming, either ; for I had no shame in my condition and my husband's fortune,—only a resentment for those who affected to expect it.

"‘You are looking well,’ said my father, staring at me. ‘How do you like the life you are living?’

"Kornel smiled boldly across to me, and I laughed.

"‘I was never so happy in my life,’ I answered—and that, at any rate, was true.

"My father grunted, and sat listening to the gentle flow of talk with which Kornel gagged him the while I busied myself with the last turn of the cooking and set the table to rights. But he glanced at me from time to time with some-

TALES FROM THE VELDT

thing of surprise and disapproval ; perhaps a white woman with no Kafir servant had never met his eyes before. Kornel did not miss the expression of his face.

“ ‘We will show you something new in the dinner line,’ he remarked knowingly. ‘There are things you can’t teach to a Kafir, you know.’ ”

“ ‘What things?’ demanded my father.

“ ‘Ah, you shall see in a moment,’ answered Kornel, nodding mysteriously. ‘Christina will show you. Have you ever heard of a ragout?’ ”

“ My father shook his head. Neither had I ; but I held my tongue.

“ ‘Well,’ said Kornel, ‘a ragout is a fowl cooked as Christina has cooked it. It is a very favorite dish among the rich men in Johannesburg. If you will draw up your chair to the table you shall see.’ ”

“ It is true that I had a good hand with a fowl, stewed in a fashion of my own, which was mainly the outcome of ignorance and emergency ; but it was very fortunate that on that day of all days the contrivance should have turned out so well. It was tender, and the flesh

HER OWN STORY

was seasoned to just the right flavor by the stuff I stewed with it—certain herbs, Katje, and a hint of a whiff of garlic. Garlic is a thing you must not play with: like sin, you can never undo it, whatever forgiveness you win. But a leaf or two bruised between two clean pebbles, and the pebbles boiled with the stew, spices the whole thing as a touch of devil spices a man.

“You may be sure I was anxious about it, and watched Kornel and my pa as they started to eat. Kornel swallowed his first mouthful with an appearance of keen judgment; then he winked swiftly to me, and nodded slightly. It was his praise of the dish. Oh, if you had known my man, you would not need telling that that was enough for me. My father commenced to eat as though curious of the food before him. He gave no sign of liking or otherwise; but presently he squared his shoulders, drew his chair closer to the table, and gave his mind to the matter.

“‘That’s right, walk into it,’ said Kornel.

“‘It is very good indeed,’ said my father,

TALES FROM THE VELDT

eating thoughtfully, and presently I helped him to some more. Kornel gave him soda-water with whiskey in it, and thereafter there were other things to eat—nearly thirty shillings' worth. After that they sat and smoked, and drank the strong coffee I made for them, and passed the whiskey bottle to and fro between them. All the while Kornel babbled amiably of foolish things, sunsets, and Shakespeare and the ways of women, till I caught myself wondering whether indeed he relished the change from the wide clean veld of the farm to this squalid habitation of toil.

“‘I suppose,’ said my father at last, when Kornel had finished talking about sunsets,—‘I suppose a ragoo, as you call it, is very expensive to make?’

“‘I really couldn't say,’ answered Kornel. ‘But I should think not.’

“‘H'm; and you think a Kafir could not be taught to make them?’

“Kornel laughed. ‘I should be sorry to try,’ he said.

“My father pondered on that for a while,

HER OWN STORY

smoking strongly and glancing from time to time at me.

“‘I’m growing an old man,’ he said at last, ‘and old men are lonely at the best.’

“‘Some seem to wish it,’ said Kornel.

“‘I say they are lonely,’ repeated my father sharply. ‘I have no wife, and I cannot be bothered with getting another at my time of life.’ He shook his gray head sadly. ‘Not that I should have to look far for one,’ he added, however.

“Kornel laughed, and my father looked at him angrily.

“‘If it had not been for you,’ he said, ‘I should still have had my daughter Christina to live with me. I am tired of being alone, and I cannot nurse the wrong done me by my own flesh and blood. You and Christina had better come out to the farm and live with me.’

“‘And leave my business?’ asked Kornel.

“‘Oh, there is mud and water on the farm, if your business pleases you,’ retorted my father. ‘But out there we do not take the bread out of the mouths of Kafirs.’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

“‘I see,’ answered Kornel briefly ; and I, who watched him, knew from his voice that there was to be no truce after that, that we should still earn our livelihood by the mud bricks.

“‘You will come?’ asked my father.

“‘Good Lord, no!’ replied Kornel. ‘You would weary me to death in a week. I don’t mind being civil when we meet, but live with you! It would be to make oneself a vegetable.’

“My father heard him out with a grave face, and then rose to his feet. There was a stateliness in his manner that grieved me, for when a man meets a rebuff with silence and dignity he is aging.

“‘You are right, perhaps,’ he said. ‘I don’t know, but you may be. Anyhow, I have enjoyed an excellent meal, and I thank you. Good-bye, Christina!’

“When he was gone, Kornel turned to me.

“‘It is evident you cannot have both a husband and a father,’ he said ; ‘but I am sorry for the rudeness, *kleintje*. He is a greater man than I.’

“‘I think you might have made it other-

HER OWN STORY

wise,' I answered, for my heart ached for my father.

"He shrugged his shoulders. 'You must manage to forgive me,' he said. 'I have a thousand dozen bricks to make, and that will be punishment enough.'

"'But you will not start again to-night!' I cried, for it was already the thin end of evening, and he was taking off his clean clothes.

"'A thousand dozen is a big handful,' he answered, smiling. 'There's nothing like getting a grip on the work ahead.'

"So in a few minutes he was down in the water again, and the mud flew as he worked at the heart-breaking task he had taken upon him. After all, the 'ragout' was expensive to make. It came dearer than we expected.

"Late into the night he held on, though thrice I went out to the bank of the stream to beg him to quit it and come to bed. There was a great pale moon that night, which threw up the colors of things strongly, and I have yet in my mind—and my heart—that picture,—the stained water, and the bank of gray mud over it,

TALES FROM THE VELDT

and between the two my Kornel bent over the endless boxes, vehemently working with no consideration for the limits of his strength. His arms gleamed with the wet, and were ceaseless ; he might have been a dumb machine, without capacity for weariness. If he had toiled before, now he toiled doubly ; there was a trouble in his mind to be sweated out and a debt of money to be repaid. And also, like a peril always near at hand, there was the thin margin that stood between us and starvation.

“When he came to bed at length, he lay down without the greeting he was wont to give me—lapsed into his place beside me with the limpness of a man spent to the utmost ounce. He slept without turning on his side, his worn hands, half-closed, lying loosely on the quilt. Yet within an hour after daylight he rose with narrow, sleep-burdened eyes, fumbled into his clothes, and staggered out to the spruit again, to resume his merciless work with the very fever of energy. The Kafirs that worked leisurely on the next plot stopped to look at him and to wonder at the speed with which the

HER OWN STORY

rows of drying bricks lengthened and multiplied. I saw them pointing as I stood at the door, heavy-hearted and anxious, and envied the ease of their manner of life, and the simplicity that could be content with such work at such a wage. Yes, I have envied Kafirs, Katje ; there are times for all women when we envy the dead.

“But it was the day after that that the trouble came upon us, great and violent and unawaited. Kornel had been up at daybreak again, working as strongly as ever, though his mouth was loose with the strain and his face very yellow and white. The drying and the dry bricks were lying on the ground in long rows, and some which were hard were already stacked to make room for others. It was a tremendous output for one man in the time it had taken ; and when the Kafirs turned out, gabbling and laughing as usual, they stopped to look in surprise at our plot and the great quantity of bricks. They gathered in a group, and talked among themselves and pointed, and presently I was aware there was something toward. One of them in particular,—a great

TALES FROM THE VELDT

brown brute, with bulky shoulders and huge arms, seemed to be concerned in the affair; he stared continually towards Kornel, and talked loudly, his voice running up into the squeak of a Kafir when he is excited, or angry, or afraid; and presently he stepped over our border line and walked down to the bricks. He was jabbering to himself all the time as he stooped and picked up bricks and examined them closely, and glanced down to the spruit where Kornel was still working.

"I watched him, but I said nothing, hoping he would go away before Kornel saw him; but he kept on, and presently my man looked up.

"He saw the Kafir at once, and climbed up the bank pretty quickly. There was something like a smile on his face, a look as though he had found the relief he needed. He walked swiftly over to the Kafir.

"'What are you doing here?' he demanded, keeping his eyes unwinkingly on the staring eyes of the Kafir.

"The latter held a dried brick in his great

HER OWN STORY

paw, and now he thrust it forward and broke into a torrent of speech. He accused Kornel of having trespassed in the night and stolen the bricks of the Kafirs. No man, he said, could have made so many by himself, and then he began to call names. I shuddered and put my hands before my face, and took them down again in time to see Kornel's fist fly up and out, and the great Kafir reel back from a vicious blow in the face.

"But he gave way for a moment only. Next instant he recovered and his huge arm rose, and I screamed and ran forward as the brick, dry and hard as a stone, struck Kornel on the head and tumbled him, loosely like a dead man, among the rows of bricks about him. I did not see the Kafir run away; I saw only the thin white face of my man turned up to the sun, and the blood that ran from his brown hair. I lifted his head and called to him; but his head lolled on his shoulders, and I let him lie while I ran out crying to find help.

"It was some of the yellow folk who carried him in for me, and brought the German doctor.

TALES FROM THE VELDT

Kornel was on the bed when he came, and he caused the cut to be bandaged, and then spoke abstrusely of the effect of the blow, so that I understood nothing at all. I learned, however, how I was to tend him, how feed him, and how he would lie unconscious for long intervals when there would be nothing at all to do for him. But he told me I had nothing to fear in the end. Indeed, he had a kind of cheeriness which seems to belong to doctors, which did much to comfort me and steady me for what was to come. Kornel would not die, he said; and it was that assurance I chiefly needed.

"The day went slowly for me, I can tell you. There was yet food enough in the house to last us a little while, and I made a mess for Kornel, and ate what I wanted myself. He recovered his sense of things once or twice, but when night came he dropped off again into a stupor from which he was not to be roused, and it was then I left him. I felt as though I were a traitor to him in his weakness; but my mind had buzzed hopelessly all day about the problem of our mere living, and I saw nothing else

HER OWN STORY

for it, so down I went to the spruit to earn what I might for my sick husband.

"The moon gave me light, and I had watched Kornel often enough to know how to go about the work. But the water, as it flowed about my legs, bit me with a chill that made me gasp, and the effort of the work, the constant bending and lifting, tried every muscle in my body. I had seen the cruelty of the work in its traces on Kornel, and knew how little it gave and how much it took ; but with this first trial of it came the realization, never lost since, of how gallant a man I had chosen to stand between me and the world, and how much I owed him. I had not time to think a great deal, for the torture of brick-making is partly in the fact that while it wrenches the body, it joins the mind to its infinite triviality. If you think, you do not pack the mud as it must be packed, and the sun crumbles your bricks to dust. It is no task for a real man at all ; even for a woman, it debases, it unmakes, it breaks.

"I worked hard at it, husbanding my strength, and within an hour I was weak and

TALES FROM THE VELDT

foolish with the effort. Twice I had left it to go in and see if all was well with Kornel, and this rested me ; but I was now resolved that I must rest no more, if ever our debt was to be paid and bread earned for the grim days to come. So I stayed in the bitter water and worked on, till even the sense of pain was dulled and it seemed that I was past the capacity of feeling.

“I was toiling thus (never mind my old troubles, Katje, dear ; this is years ago) when a sound came to my ears that caused me to look up. It had been going on for some time, persisting till it gained my notice, and suddenly I became aware that there were men on our ground among the bricks. I climbed half-way up the bank to look at them, where they could not see me ; and I saw several dark figures bent to some business or moving here and there. I caught the sound of hushed voices, too, though no words ; and then the hot wrath set my blood racing as I realized what was going on. The Kafirs, who knew my man was wounded and helpless—the very beast who had felled him—were stealing the bricks he had labored so

HER OWN STORY

stoutly to make. My head swam with a delirium of vivid anger at the meanness of the crime, and without calculation, with no thought of fear, I scrambled up and ran at them, shouting.

"I suppose they were surprised at my coming out of the spruit, and some of them ran as soon as they heard me. Others stood and waited ominously—you know what a Kafir is with a woman,—and doubtless I should have met my last earthly troubles then and there, but that from the road beyond us there were other shouts, and men came running.

"I saw the forms of the rescuers as they raced up, and marked one tall young man who ran past me with his arm lifted before him. There was a flash and a bang, and I sat down heavily as the white men shot at the Kafirs who were now all running to cover. It took but an instant, and I remember it as one remembers a thing seen at night by a lightning flash, sharp and feverish.

"‘Ye’ve no need to be feared,’ some one said to me. ‘They’re only my clerks, but they’re a handy lot.’

TALES FROM THE VELDT

"A short stout man was standing over me, and as I looked up I saw it was old Pagan. Away in the darkness there were yet cries and the sound of blows, where the white men pursued the Kafirs.

"‘Ye see,’ continued the old man, ‘I heard o’ what had happened, an’ I counted on this. I’m a man o’ experience, Mrs. du Plessis, an’ the very same thing happened to me once. So I got a few o’ my lads along, and we’ve been waitin’ for what ye might call the eventuality. I’m no’ exactly a negrophilist, ye ken. An’ after seein’ you squatterin’ about in the mud yonder, while yer husband was sick a-bed, there was no holdin’ the lads. No’ that I endeavored to restrain them, in any precise sense.’

"Away in the darkness a Kafir shrieked agonizedly.

"‘There ye are,’ said the old man. ‘Yon’s chivalry. If ye had been a man, they’d never ha’ put their hearts into it like that.’

"He helped me to my feet and gave me an arm towards the house.

"‘There’s just one thing,’ he said, ‘and it’s

HER OWN STORY

this. I'm no' quite the slave-driver ye might take me for—workin' in the night to drag a pittance out o' me! For instance, I've a job in the store that yer man can have, if it'll suit him, and if you're willing yerself. It's no' a big thing, but it's white. And for the present while, I dare say I can advance ye enough to be going on with. And me and the lads 'll say no word about seein' you at yer work.'

"What is the use of carrying this tale on? It was there we ceased to have the troubles that go to making tales, and entered upon the ordered life of good industry and clean living. But, Katje, of all that came afterwards, money and success, and even children, there was nothing to knit us as did the sorry months by the spruit, when my Kornel proved himself the man I knew him to be. Be happy, Katje; be happy at any rate."

I think she has been happy.

THE END



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW

AUG 1 1914

SEP 17 1914

NOV 8 1915

JUN 29 1917

APR 16 1918
DEC 28 1918

FEB 7 1921

SEP 1 1921

OCT 10 1921

MAY 2 1923

AUG 2 1924

MAY 9 1927

267701

Gilbert

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

